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JULY 1978 #416

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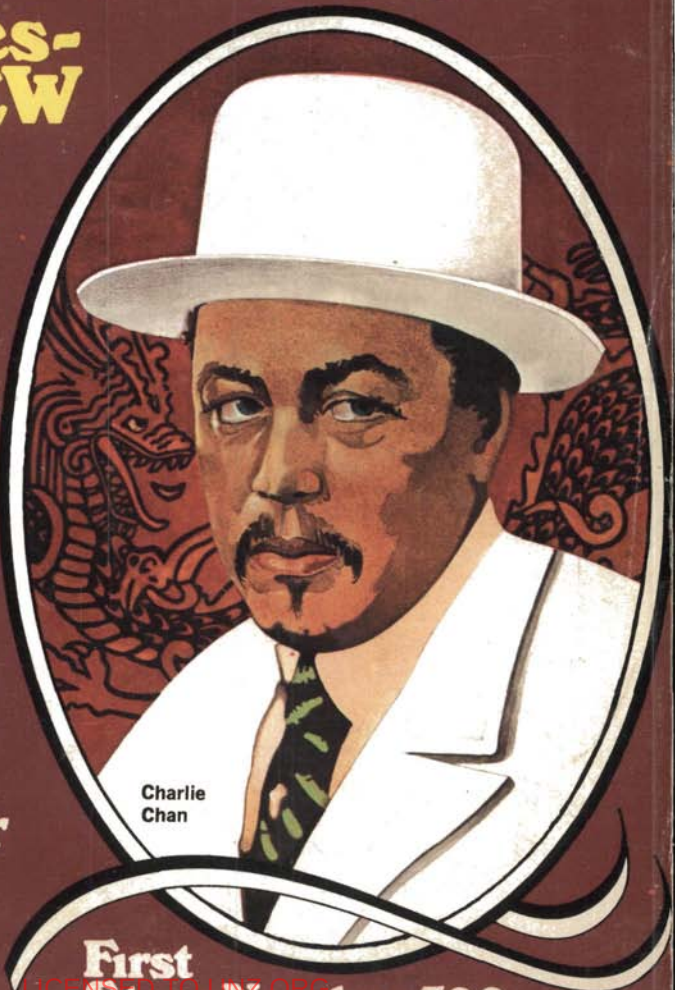

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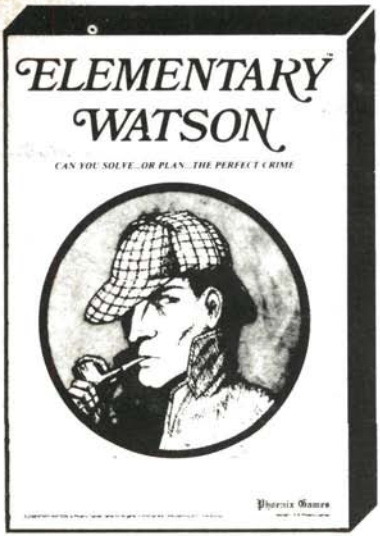

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ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine ®

THE BIRTHDAY KILLER	Hugh Pentecost	6
THE YOUNG RUNNERS	James Holding	21
THE MISSING MONEY	R. L. Stevens	35
THE GREAT BLUEBERRY PIE HEIST	Charles Peterson	46
MRS. HENDERSON TALKS TO GOD	Libby MacCall	57
MILADY BIGAMY	Lillian de la Torre	65
HARD LUCK STORY	Richard A. Moore	81
THE SHREDDED ROSE	Lynwood Sawyer	86
MESSAGE FROM A DEAD MAN	Robert Cittadino	92
INSPECTOR WEXFORD ON HOLIDAY	Ruth Rendell	95
AND THEN THERE WAS ONE	Caryl Brahms & S. J. Simon	118
THE LAST OF THE ROSSITERS	Thomas Walsh	128
WE INTERRUPT THIS MAGAZINE	Alice Laurance	142
THE PROBLEM OF THE OLD OAK TREE	Edward D. Hoch	144
MYSTERY NEWSLETTER	Otto Penzler & Chris Steinbrunner	120
THE JURY BOX	Jon L. Breen	123

PRESIDENT & PUBLISHER: *Joel Davis* **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 72, No. 1, Whole No. 416, JULY, 1978. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at $1.00 a copy. Annual subscription $14.00 in U.S.A., $16.00 elsewhere. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 2600, Greenwich, Ct., 06835. Second-class postage paid at N.Y., N.Y., and additional mailing office. *© 1978 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE® is the registered trademark of Ellery Queen. Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope, the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.*

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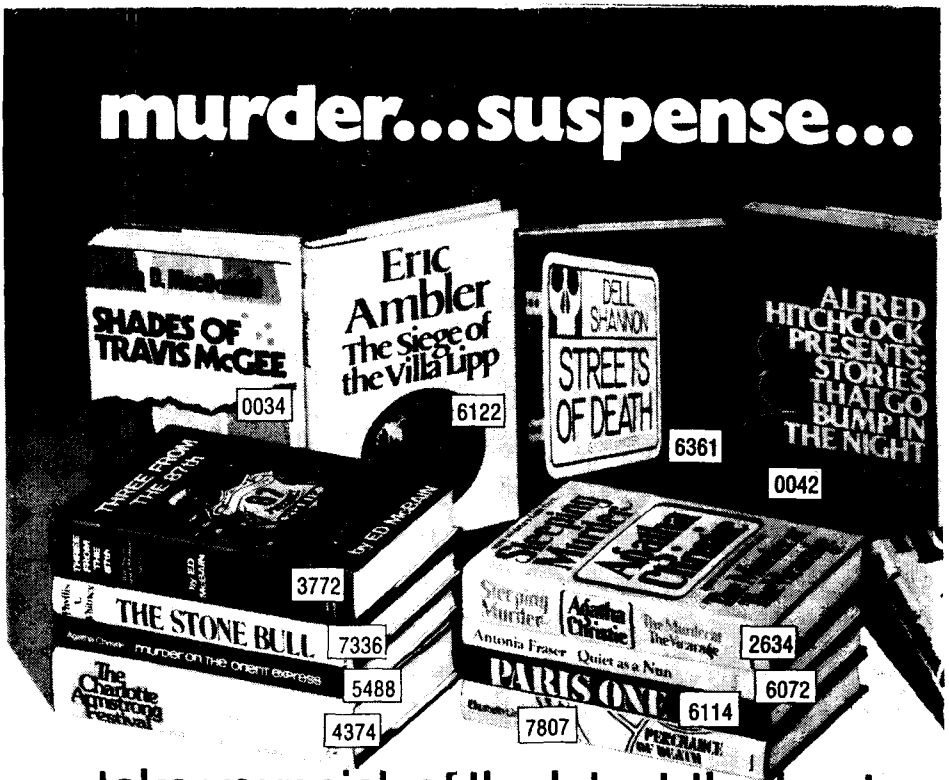

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a *NEW* Jericho story by

HUGH PENTECOST

A sure-fire crime-and-detective situation—foolproof to catch attention, to "hook" the reader: an unknown person in New York City threatened by letter to kill people on their birthday—and did! Four victims so far. And then John Jericho, the huge Viking-warrior of an artist, the Good Samaritan of modern detectives, the "protector of the underdog," the sleuthhound who would be sorely missed—Jericho himself received the warning! Resist this opening, this plot gambit, if you can . . .

THE BIRTHDAY KILLER

by HUGH PENTECOST

The letter was quite explicit. It was handwritten in a bold script on plain white paper that could have been bought at a thousand newsstands or drug stores. The envelope was a thirteen-cent stamped envelope attainable at any branch post office. It was addressed to John Jericho, Jefferson Mews #16, New York City. There was no salutation on the piece of plain paper, only the message.

You will not live beyond your birthday, 3/10/78.

Jericho, six feet four inches tall and 230 pounds of hard-muscled body, with thick red hair and a red beard that made him look like a Viking warrior, sat alone at the breakfast table in his Jefferson Mews studio-apartment. The letter lay open on top of other mail and the morning paper that had been in his mailbox. He was surrounded by the brilliant vital paintings that had made him famous, some finished, some still in work. The coffee in the mug on the table beside him had turned cold. The pot-bowled pipe he had filled prior to reading his mail rested beside the coffee mug, gone out after the first lighting.

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He had opened this letter first because it had no return address on it. He knew who the other mail was from. At any other time he would have thought of it as a crank letter, a bad joke. But he had already glanced at the front page of his newspaper as he brought it up from the mailbox. The headline on a follow-up story had attracted his attention.

POLICE REPORT NO LEAD TO THE BIRTHDAY KILLER

A year ago the city had been horrified by the Son of Sam, called the .44 killer, who had murdered the Lord-knows-how-many people in cold blood—young couples parked in cars after dark. Now there was The Birthday Killer.

At first there had seemed to be some sort of connection between The Birthday Killer's victims. First, there had been Frances Kelleher, a woman judge presiding in the criminal courts. Then there had been Lou Ducillo, an Assistant D.A., a prosecutor of criminal cases. Then George Armstrong, a crime reporter for *Newsview* magazine. Each of them had received exactly the same letter as the one that lay on Jericho's breakfast table except for the birthday date.

Each letter had been received about three days before the birthday date. Judge Kelleher had paid no attention to hers. She had received many threatening letters in her long and distinguished career. She was ill-advised to ignore the threat. She was shot to death in the self-service elevator in her apartment building a few hours before her birthday had passed. No clues. No witnesses.

Two months later Lou Ducillo, the Assistant D.A., got his letter just two days before his birthday. Exactly the same wording, except his birthdate, as the one Judge Kelleher had received. Same handwriting, according to the experts at the Homicide Bureau. Lieutenant Mark Kreevich of Homicide saw the glimmering of a motive, a possible connection. Someone was getting revenge for the prosecution and sentencing of a criminal. But which criminal? Ducillo had prosecuted almost 20 cases in Judge Kelleher's court.

Ducillo decided to take an unplanned vacation out of the country. He didn't choose to wait for the Homicide detective to sort out all the possibilities. But the Assistant D.A. was shot to death in a men's room at Kennedy Airport 20 minutes before his plane was to leave for the Virgin Islands. No clues. No witnesses.

Three months passed and Kreevich hadn't run anything substantial to earth. Then George Armstrong, the crime reporter, got

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his letter, three days before his birthday. He hotfooted it to Lieutenant Kreevich. Same writing, same wording as the others except for the birthdate. Connection? Armstrong had covered 13 of Ducillo's prosecutions in Judge Kelleher's court. That seemed to narrow the number of cases from 20 to 13.

Armstrong was offered police protection. He accepted—but he had to keep an appointment he had with a key person in a story he was covering. Kreevich's guards would pick him up an hour later at the Yale Club. They never caught up with him. He was found shot to death in his car in a parking lot. No clues. No witnesses.

Kreevich went about the grim business of tracking down everyone connected with the 13 cases that linked Judge Kelleher, Ducillo, and Armstrong. Nothing tangible. And then the whole structure of Kreevich's case was jolted. There was a fourth killing.

Wu Sung, the proprietor of a Chinese Restaurant in Chinatown, was found shot to death in an alley between his restaurant and the parking lot behind it. In his pocket was a letter from The Birthday Killer. As far as Kreevich could determine there was absolutely no connection between the dead Chinese and the three others. Wu Sung's people were certain that none of them—the Judge, Ducillo, or Armstrong—had ever been patrons of the restaurant. Wu Sung had never been involved in a criminal case, not as a witness, not even as a spectator. As far as they knew, he had never spoken of the now notorious Birthday Killer. Nor had he mentioned to anyone receiving a threatening note from the killer. The day he died was Wu Sung's birthday.

Now, a month later, a letter lay open on Jericho's breakfast table. Jericho had never met or had any communication with the four people who had received letters before him. The only possible connection Jericho had with the case was a long friendship with Lieutenant Mark Kreevich.

Kreevich was not a typical cop. He was a man with a law degree, a man with sophisticated tastes. He was a man dedicated to law and order, but not in the jargon sense of the phrase used by office-seeking politicians. People had a right to live without fear; crime should be prevented, not solved after the fact. Jericho, the artist, was involved in a lifelong crusade against man's inhumanity to man. His paintings were a perpetual protest against viciousness and violence. In his lifestyle he had become a protector of the underprivileged, of the underdog, the helpless innocents

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trapped by ruthless men. The similarity of their aims had drawn Kreevich and Jericho together.

Jericho reached for his telephone and dialed.

"I have a letter in the mail this morning that will interest you," he said, when Lieutenant Kreevich came on the line.

"Someone putting the arm on you for tickets to the policemen's ball?" Kreevich asked.

"It's one of your kind of letters," Jericho said.

"My kind?"

"The Birthday Killer."

There were a few seconds of silence, then Kreevich said, "You have to be kidding."

"The wording is the same as the others, if the newspapers have reported correctly," Jericho said. "You will have to see it to be certain that the handwriting is the same as the others, of course."

Kreevich's voice had turned cold and impersonal. "When is your birthday? Tomorrow? The next day?"

"That's an interesting variation," Jericho said. "This letter reads: *You will not live beyond your birthday, 3/10/78.* That is tomorrow. But March tenth isn't my birthday. My birthday is the tenth of August, which would make it 8/10/78, five months from now."

"Where are you?"

"In my studio, but not for long. I'm having a one-man show at the Cleaves Gallery, as you know if you received your invitation. The formal opening is at eleven this morning. I have to be there ahead of time. Cleaves is on 57th Street, just East of Fifth Avenue."

"I'll meet you there," Kreevich said. "Bring the letter." Concern crept into the voice. "Watch your step, Johnny. He looked you up in *Who's Who* and got your birthdate wrong. Could be."

It was a cold March day. Courage, Jericho told himself, is a happy commodity to own, but a man is a fool who doesn't know fear when there is something to be genuinely afraid of. Some kind of psycho had him on a death list, a psycho who had already struck four times without leaving a scrap of evidence.

As he dressed in his brown Harris-tweed suit to go to the opening of his show, Jericho put together what he knew about the killer. He did his work at close range where there were no witnesses: Judge Kelleher had been shot in a self-service elevator, Ducillo in

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a men's room at an airport, Armstrong in his car in a parking lot, Wu Sung in a dark alley between buildings. Did this killer confront his victims at the last moment and let them know why they were to die?

There was nothing in the pattern to suggest a sniper on a rooftop. Open spaces appeared to be safe places. It occurred to Jericho that his greatest danger might lie just outside his apartment door, in the narrow hallway. The Birthday Killer obviously didn't work in crowds—there hadn't been a single witness to his four murders. People had seen Son of Sam run away from his victims; there had been descriptions of his getaway car. But no one had seen The Birthday Killer. He chose the precise moment when he could be alone with each victim.

Jericho took a handgun from the top drawer of his bureau and slipped it into the pocket of the sheepskin-lined topcoat he planned to wear. He had a license for the gun. He had been hunted before in his long crusade against violence, but before he had always known who was hunting him.

It was time to go. He felt an unaccustomed tensing of his muscles as he opened the door into the hallway. He didn't camouflage his gun. He held it at the ready. Sunlight streamed through a window at the far end of the hall. There was no dark place for someone to hide at this time of day.

He walked to the end of the hallway where there was a right-angle turn to the one flight of stairs that led down to the street. He edged around the corner. No one was in sight. At the foot of the stairs was a narrow hallway that went to a cellar door. If he walked straight down, there might be someone at his back when he reached the front door. He went halfway, then turned, and went the rest of the way backward, facing the cellar entrance.

No one. Nothing.

Coming out onto the street was like emerging from a dark underground tunnel into warm spring sunshine. People came and went through the Mews. They smiled at him. He was a familiar figure. A world of witnesses. The Birthday Killer wouldn't strike out here in the open. It wouldn't be in keeping with his pattern.

A taxi parked at the mouth of the Mews didn't appeal to Jericho. Alone in a vehicle with a driver who might be——? Acting like a nervous old maid, he told himself. And yet the killer had struck four times without leaving a trace. No reason to think he might be less efficient on his fifth venture. Safety lay in

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crowds. Jericho decided to walk—two miles uptown to the Cleaves Gallery.

Kreevich was there ahead of him, slim, almost elegant, less like a cop than anyone he could imagine. The gallery was already well filled with painting enthusiasts. A little murmur of interest could be heard as the giant redbearded artist swept onto the scene. A hundred witnesses here.

Kreevich looked grim. He handed Jericho a brochure that the gallery had prepared for the show, listing the paintings by number and with a reprint of Jericho's *Who's Who* biography.

"Here's the mistake in your birthdate," the detective said.

It was there: John Jericho, born 3/10/38, Lakeview, Connecticut.

Jericho located Tom Cleaves, the gallery's proprietor. "How come this error, Tom?" he asked.

Cleaves scowled at the brochure. "It's from your handwritten copy, Johnny," he said.

"I'd know my own birthday."

"Copy's in my office. Let me get it," Cleaves said, and departed for an inner room.

"What took you so long?" Kreevich asked. "I was beginning to worry about you."

"I walked. Crowds seemed safer," Jericho said. From his pocket he took the threatening note and handed it to Kreevich.

Kreevich frowned. "Same damned handwriting," he said. "It looks like the McCoy."

Cleaves came back from his office with a piece of paper torn from a yellow legal pad. "Just as you wrote it, Johnny," he said.

It was there—3/10/38. Jericho saw what had happened. He'd written it in a hurry with a ballpoint pen. The first stroke of the pen had been dry and the first 8 looked like a 3.

"It's not so serious, is it?" Cleaves asked. He was a cheerful, moon-faced man. The Jericho show was going to be a huge success. "We've already sold three paintings and we've only been open half an hour. The two things you did in Washington when those Muslims held those hostages in three office buildings. And the acrobats on the beach. You're twelve thousand five hundred dollars richer than when you got up this morning."

"You've just given these brochures out this morning?" Kreevich asked.

"By hand, yes," Cleaves said. "But hundreds of them were mailed out to potential customers two weeks ago."

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Plenty of time for The Birthday Killer to have seen the incorrect birthdate and sent his warning.

They moved around, surrounded by Jericho's canvases in bright colors. They came to one titled *Beach Acrobats*. There was a SOLD sticker on the frame of the painting. Kreevich's hand closed on Jericho's wrist like a painful vise.

"My God!" Kreevich said.

"What's the matter?" Jericho asked.

Kreevich pointed with his free hand at the painting. It was a beach scene, with colored umbrellas, swimmers in the distant surf, sunbathers wearing dark glasses. In the foreground were two men involved in an acrobatic feat. One man was doing a headstand, arms spread out to steady himself. Balanced above him, actually standing on the soles of the headstander's feet, was a second man, grinning out at the world.

"Impossible!" Kreevich said.

"Difficult, but they did it," Jericho said.

"I'm not talking about the stunt," Kreevich said. "The man on top—the smiler—you know him?"

"No. I just saw him the day I made the original sketch."

Kreevich released his hold on Jericho's wrist. A little nerve twitched high up on his cheek. "His name is Fred Miller—or was Fred Miller," the detective said in a flat cold voice. "He killed a woman cop in a drug stakeout in Times Square. He later hanged himself in his jail cell. You didn't know who you were painting?"

"No idea. He was just a man on the beach."

"It's an extraordinary likeness."

"I have a photographic eye," Jericho said.

Kreevich looked straight at his friend. "He was prosecuted for Murder One by Lou Ducillo and the jury convicted. Judge Kelleher sentenced him to life. He was a heroin addict. He bought something from what he thought was a lady pusher in Times Square. She turned out to be a cop and he shot her dead. There was some outcry about police methods at the time, and George Armstrong wrote an article defending the police."

"So three of them were connected with this Fred Miller," Jericho said.

"And you painted his picture," Kreevich said. "What about the man on the bottom, the man standing on his head?"

Jericho tried to recall. "It's difficult to remember a face that's upside down."

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"But they didn't stay there all day in that position. What about when they broke it up?"

"I don't remember," Jericho said, frowning.

Kreevich found Tom Cleaves and asked him who had bought the painting. The gallery proprietor shrugged. "An old man. It was rather odd, because he paid cash and wanted to take the picture with him. I told him he'd have to leave it here for the run of the show—two weeks. He didn't like it, but he finally agreed."

"He didn't give you his name?"

"No. But I gave him a receipt for his money so he could claim the painting later."

"Describe him."

"Old, frail-looking, thick white hair. He somehow didn't look like a man who could afford $2500 for a painting. But he had it in cash."

Kreevich turned to Jericho. "One itch has been scratched, anyway," he said. "This birthday jazz. No reason for it until now."

"You know something I don't know? Jericho asked.

"Fred Miller hanged himself in his jail cell—on his birthday!" Kreevich said. "Press made something of it. Now some psycho avenger is making everyone else pay at birthday time. Let's take a walk."

Half an hour later Jericho found himself in the office of a young lawyer named Herbert Goldsteyn. On the way there in a taxi Kreevich had explained that Goldsteyn had been Fred Miller's lawyer and had fought a brilliant if losing battle for his client. Goldsteyn was a dark, wiry little man with suppressed energy that kept him wriggling in his desk chair while he chain-smoked cigarettes.

Kreevich had talked to him before because of Fred Miller's connection with three of The Birthday Killer's victims. Now he handed Goldsteyn the threatening note Jericho had received and a copy of the gallery brochure which contained a black-and-white reproduction of *Beach Acrobats*.

"Tell Johnny what you told me about your financial arrangements with Fred Miller," Kreevich said.

Goldsteyn exhaled a cloud of smoke. "People thought I was some sort of legal-aid freak," he said. "As a matter of fact I was hired and paid a substantial fee for defending him."

"By Miller?" Kreevich asked, obviously knowing the answer.

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"I don't know who paid the bills," Goldsteyn said. "I would present an accounting to Miller every couple of weeks—over the months of the trial and the appeal. A couple of days after each presenting I would get payment through the mail, in cash. A thousand dollars or more in nice new bills each time. No letter, no nothing. The money came in an ordinary stamped envelope, with an extra stamp or two added according to weight."

"Do you happen to have one of those envelopes?" Kreevich asked.

Goldsteyn grinned. "Since you called me to tell me you were coming, Lieutenant, it just happens I do." From the drawer of his desk he produced an envelope.

Kreevich placed Jericho's note beside the envelope.

"Same handwriting," Jericho said. His eyes narrowed. "The Birthday Killer paid Miller's legal bills?"

"So it would appear," Kreevich said.

"Something in the neighborhood of $30,000," Goldsteyn said.

"Have you been expecting one of these threatening notes, Mr. Goldsteyn?" Jericho asked.

The lawyer shrugged. "Why should I? I tried to save Miller. Ducillo was responsible for his conviction, the judge sentenced him, and Armstrong urged the maximum punishment in his articles. What did you do to him, Mr. Jericho?"

"It seems I painted a picture of him," Jericho said.

"I don't think so," Kreevich said. "You painted a picture of *another* man—a man who was balancing Miller in that acrobatic act on the beach."

"No face," Jericho said.

"But you could be expected to remember the face, and I think you'd better remember, friend," Kreevich said, "and fast. He thinks your birthday is tomorrow."

The human brain, Jericho told himself, is a computer, a memory bank. But like computers it is fed by man, and in the case of the brain, by the man whose brain it is. He had painted a picture of two men doing a balancing act on the beach. The one face had been clearly visible—Fred Miller's—and he had caught a perfect likeness. But the other man, his face hidden, was a zero. He'd had no reason to remember anything about him, no reason to store him in his memory bank.

He should have spent the day at the Cleaves Gallery, being

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charming to prospective buyers, but instead Jericho had gone back to his studio in Jefferson Mews. He had made dozens of sketches that day at the beach, the day of the balancing act. There might be a clue among them that would remind him of something that was presently lost, hidden.

Kreevich had offered, almost insisted, on providing a bodyguard for his friend. Jericho was perversely stubborn about it. All his adult life he had been involved with violence and danger. He had determined long ago that when his time came to confront death he wanted to do it alone. Quixotic? At any rate he was not careless. He double-locked the studio door and fastened the guard chain. He checked out the bedroom, the closets. No one was waiting for him.

He searched through file cabinets until he found the sketchbook he had used that day on the beach, almost two years ago. He sat down in a big armchair opposite his easel, first taking the handgun out of his pocket and placing it on a table beside him. He was ready for any surprise. He couldn't shake the feeling that this room was where the final confrontation would take place.

The sketches stirred nothing in his memory. There had been brilliant sunlight, the waves foaming as they broke on the sand; scores of people were sunbathing, girls almost nude, men tanned a coffee brown—and that absurd balancing act, Fred Miller smiling his delight, and the upside-down man beneath him faceless. Nothing else. Absolutely nothing.

The day wore on and Jericho found himself exhausted from searching for something that wasn't there. He slept, slumped in the armchair.

It must have been a long time because when he woke, the room was dark except for the reflected light from a street lamp at the window and the bright stars visible through the skylight. Jericho glanced at the illuminated dial of his wrist watch. It was almost eleven o'clock. He had slept for nearly seven hours.

An odd thought occurred to him. If tomorrow had actually been his birthday there was only about one hour to go before it arrived.

He turned on a lamp and went to the sideboard where he poured himself a Jack Daniels on the rocks. Then back to trying to put it together. There was one thing missing, he told himself. There was still no connection to Wu Sung, the Chinese restaurateur.

It was like a flash of lightning illuminating his mind. He saw the balancing act on the beach. He saw Fred Miller finally topple

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down to the sand, laughing. Then the upside-down man somersaulted to his feet and for a moment his smiling face was there as he turned to Miller. The man was an Oriental!

Jericho picked up the gun from the table and slipped it into his jacket pocket. Now he would be the hunter and not the hunted. He went out into the hall, careful as before, then down to the street. At the end of the Mews was a waiting cab.

"There's a place called The China Palace somewhere near Mott Street in Chinatown," Jericho told the driver.

"They close up about this time down there," the driver said.

"Just the same," Jericho said.

The cab drove him deep into the city and eventually stopped outside The China Palace. Jericho paid and went to the door. Some customers were emerging and Jericho stood aside for them. Then he went in and found his way blocked, just inside, by a young Chinese.

Jericho felt his heart jam against his ribs. It was a well remembered face now, the face of the upside-down man in the balancing act on the beach.

"I'm sorry, sir, but we are no longer serving," the Chinese man said.

"I do not want to be served. I want to talk to you," Jericho said.

"We are closing now, sir."

"Your name?"

"I am Kim Sung, the proprietor."

"I think you know my name is Jericho."

Tiny beads of perspiration stood out on Kim Sung's forehead.

"If you care to sit down at a table while my waiters clear the place," Sung said.

Jericho saw that there was just one table occupied—four people preparing to leave. Sung led the way to a table some distance from the door. "You will excuse me while I arrange for someone else to stand at the door." He crossed the floor and spoke to a waiter at some length. He bowed politely to the departing customers. He came back to Jericho and sat down opposite him. "What can I do for you, Mr. Jericho?"

"I got tired of waiting for you," Jericho said.

"I don't understand."

"I think you do," Jericho said. "Let me tell you something, Mr. Sung. In my jacket pocket, just under the edge of the table, is a .38 police special. It is aimed directly at your stomach. If you

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make a move toward me I promise to blow a hole in you big enough to drive a truck through. I got your letter, so you see I know that you are The Birthday Killer."

Sung moistened his thin pale lips. "Look around you, Mr. Jericho. You will see that you have no chance in the world of leaving this place."

Chinese waiters, doing no cleaning up, guarded every exit from the large room.

"So we are both going to die," Jericho said flatly. "There's a joke about it, Sung. This isn't my birthday."

"It doesn't matter," Sung said. "I could not have waited till later. Your painting at the Cleaves Gallery. Someone finally told you the face you painted was Fred Miller's?"

"Lieutenant Kreevich."

"A clever man, but not quite clever enough."

"You bought the painting?"

"I had the painting bought. I hoped to have it removed from the gallery before someone asked questions and stirred your memory."

Jericho drew a deep breath. "Before this stalemate brings an end to both of us I'd like to know why. Why the killings? Why your own father? He was your father?"

Sung tilted back slightly in his chair. His eyes glittered in the light from the chandelier over his head. "Fred Miller was the best friend I've ever had," he said.

"So you embarked on a psychotic revenge scheme. I can understand your motive against the prosecutor, the judge, the crime writer. But why your father? He had no connection with the case."

Sung began to rock, very gently, back and forth in his chair. "Let me tell it," he said. "Let me tell it just once, because no one knows it all."

Jericho nodded, his finger tight on the trigger of his gun. One wrong move and Sung would never get to tell it all.

Nor, Jericho thought, would he ever get to hear it all if he made an overt move. The Chinese waiters seemed to have formed a kind of circle around the table, at a distance but with no effort to hide the fact that they were a trap.

"Vietnam—the Establishment's war, the politicians' war," Kim Sung said. "Fred Miller and I met there—in Vietnam. You ask what a Chinese was doing in the United States army in Vietnam?" His smile was bitter. "I am an American. Born here on

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Mott Street. Went to school here in the city. Graduated from the school of engineering at Columbia. This is the land of opportunity, you know. The only job a Chinese engineer could find was selling chop suey in his father's restaurant to American Americans who think it's a Chinese dish! But the army took me, not as an engineer but because I spoke languages that were useful in Vietnam."

Sung's bitterness cut at some vein of sympathy in Jericho. He went on.

"I met Fred Miller in Saigon. We were both on a short leave. On leave you drank and found women, and many soldiers found drugs. Fred was a sensitive, compassionate man. He had seen old men and women and children killed senselessly. He had seen crops and forests defoliated. He had seen isolated villages of no military significance bombed flat. Drugs helped him forget what he had seen. He wanted to break the habit but he couldn't. I tried to help him. I hated what drugs did to men and particularly to Fred. I stayed with him while he sweated with terrible hungers. Sometimes I thought he was winning the fight."

"Where did soldiers find drugs?" Jericho asked.

"Black market operated by other soldiers with gold bars on their collars. They got rich on it. That is the way of high command. Like everywhere else, the powerful feed off the helpless. Well—in an air raid Fred and I managed to rescue some high brass. We were wounded, decorated together, and honorably discharged together.

"Back home I had a job—here, selling chop suey. Fred could find nothing. He was still fighting drugs. I—I spent every free moment I had trying to help him. It is thought that for a man to love a man is evil, or sick. But I loved Fred. I would have given anything on earth to help him with his trouble—drugs. We spent all our free time away from sources, like the day you saw us on the beach. And then—then my father chose to send me on a business trip to San Francisco. I refused. Fred was going through a bad spell.

"But my father was made of iron. I could not help Fred without my job here. So I had to go. I made arrangements to call Fred on the telephone every day at a certain time. On the second day he didn't answer. I knew! I knew!"

Sung brought his fist down on the table. "I had to stay another few days. Fred never answered the phone. When I got back here it

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was all over. He had killed a policewoman who had been posing as a supplier."

Sung twisted, as if in pain, in his chair. "That is how we do things in this Land of the Free, Mr. Jericho. The police, the F.B.I., infiltrate criminal groups, invite the helpless into their webs, urge them to commit a crime and when they do—in this case the possession of drugs—they throw them in the slammer."

"It was more than possession of drugs, Sung. He killed a policewoman," Jericho said.

"Only after she had tricked him! I heard of a highly recommended lawyer, a man named Goldsteyn. I persuaded Fred to hire him. Goldsteyn thought he had a chance to save Fred."

"You were the person who paid Goldsteyn's fee?"

"Yes. Goldsteyn's argument in court was a sound one. Fred was a sick man. The police had preyed on his sickness to drive him to kill, something he would never have done had he been himself. Goldsteyn made the point that Fred was a man who needed help, not a murderer who deserved punishment. The prosecutor didn't see it that way, the jury didn't see it that way, the judge threw the book at him. And Fred—poor Fred made a rope out of a bedsheet and hanged himself on his birthday! These people, without understanding, without compassion, had killed him."

"And so you went after them one by one?"

"Yes. One by one."

"But your father?"

Sung moistened pale lips. "He sent me to San Francisco against my will. If I had not been away I could have prevented what happened to Fred. I would have been with him, helping to fight his battle."

Jericho was speechless.

Sung's smile looked pasted on his face. "So here we are, Mr. Jericho. If you kill me you will never get out of this room alive. If you don't kill me—you will never get out of this room alive."

The room was so still that Jericho thought he could hear a faucet dripping in the kitchen. And then there was a roar of sound. Men came charging into the room through a door. The circle of waiters was broken. There was a gunshot.

Across the table from Jericho, Sung had suddenly risen. From his sleeve, as if by magic, appeared a glittering knife. He lunged at Jericho.

The artist dodged and fired, at a knee not the stomach. Sung

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screamed and fell across the table.

"You damn fool!" Kreevich said. He was standing over Jericho who had flattened himself on the floor. "Why couldn't you let us handle it?"

Jericho fought an absurd urge to laugh hysterically as he struggled to his feet. "How did you get here?" he asked.

"I got a report on Miller's war record. He and Kim Sung were decorated together. That tied it all up. It took hours to get a judge to sign a search warrant. The police have to work by the book. I tried to find you, you idiot, and I realized you must have remembered the face of the upside-down man and were playing the role of a silly dragon killer by yourself."

The laughter came. "Do you suppose a man can get himself a drink in this place?" Jericho asked.

"Q"

CRIME RHYME

by John H. Dromey

Chemical quickdraw: mace race.
Comical con man: gangster prankster.
Counterfeit bills with the ink still wet: runny funny money.
Cracking an empty safe: filch zilch.
Fingerprint powder: bust dust.
Keeping out the teargas: mask task.
Narc squad search: dope grope.
Picking an empty pocket: dip slip.
Prison diary: jail tale.
Prison toilet: can can.
Reluctant witness: balkie talkie.
Riot helmet: cop top.
Select a Santa's helper from the line-up: pick Nick.
Smuggler's hollow heel: loot boot.
Unsigned confession: 'fess up mess up.

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a NEW library cop story by

JAMES HOLDING

Hal Johnson, formerly with Homicide, is now a library cop—a book detective who tracks down lost volumes for the public library and collects overdue books that have not been returned to the library. His old boss on the force, Lieutenant Randall, tends to sneer at Hal, calling him a "sissy" cop. But even an innocent-looking book chase can require a tough-skinned investigator . . .

THE YOUNG RUNNERS

by JAMES HOLDING

It was the worst kind of tenement. In the 1200 block of Gardenia Street. I checked my list to be sure I had the address right. Then I went inside, looking for a young man named Jasper Jones.

In my capacity as a library cop, I'd been in the neighborhood before, trying to trace books that had been stolen from the public library. This time, however, I was on Gardenia Street merely to collect an overdue book. A routine call.

Gardenia Street. The littered filthy hallway of the tenement didn't smell like gardenias, believe me. Luckily the room I was looking for was on the ground floor. I rapped lightly on the door.

It was cautiously opened a few inches by a once-pretty woman with a pale face and a do-it-yourself blonde dye job. She peered out at me with tired-looking eyes.

"Yes?"

"I'm looking for Jasper Jones," I said. "Is he here?"

Sudden concern made her tired eyes even more tired. "Jasper? He's not home from school yet. What's he done?" she asked. "Has Jasper done something? Who are you?"

I told her, and showed her my ID card from the library.

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"Oh," she said, relieved. "Well, Jasper isn't home yet, like I said. I'm sorry."

"You're Mrs. Jones? Jasper's mother?"

"That's right." She perked up a little, fluffing her hair with one hand. She didn't invite me in, though.

"Maybe you can help me then, Mrs. Jones. If you can find Jasper's overdue library book and pay me the small fine he owes on it, I won't need to bother Jasper at all."

She said, "Jasper's really a terrific reader for an eleven-year-old, Mr. Johnson." There was pride in her voice. "And consequently, he gets so many books from the public library that I can't even begin to keep track of them. So . . ."

"He borrows a lot of books, all right," I agreed. "Our children's librarian told me that. But this is the first time Jasper's ever failed to return a book on time. So it's no big deal, Mrs. Jones. With his excellent record I'll even forget the fine if you'll just give me the book."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Johnson." Mrs. Jones sounded harried. "I'm trying to get dressed to go to work and I'm late, okay? Can't you find Jasper and ask *him* about your book? I haven't got time to look for it right now."

"Sure," I said. "Where'll I find him?"

"Well, you can either wait here till he gets home, or you can probably find him in the park two blocks down. He usually stops there on his way home from school."

"Thanks, Mrs. Jones." I left her and went out and took a deep breath of the polluted outside air. It smelled as fresh as gardenias compared with the air in the tenement hallway.

I walked the two blocks down Gardenia to Mrs. Jones's "park." It turned out to be a playground. No trees, flowers, grass, or rustic benches. Just a sun-baked expanse of bare beaten earth, enclosed by a chain-link fence eight feet high. At one end of the enclosure was a mounted basketball hoop, and I could make out the faint markings of old softball bases in the dust. A bunch of kids, some black, some white, all ages up to about 15, was having a high old time in a pickup basketball game beneath the single basket. There was a lot of yelling, jumping, and juvenile cursing, and a lot of wild set and hook shots that never came near the basket. Another bunch of kids was standing around offering comments and waiting for a chance to get into the game.

It was evident that Jasper Jones wasn't the only ghetto kid to

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stop here on his way home from school, because schoolbooks, homework papers, and bulging book bags were scattered on the ground along the inside of the wire fence. Three battered old bicycles, and one that looked almost new, were leaning against the fence.

I went into the playground and walked along the fence past the books and bicycles toward the knot of nonparticipants in the game. They watched me come in unfriendly silence. I didn't know whether their unfriendliness was because I was dressed so well for this neighborhood, or because they smelled cop on me. Probably the latter. I'd been a Homicide cop for quite a few years before I switched to the public library, and I knew that these street-wise ghetto kids could smell fuzz a mile off—even harmless library fuzz like me.

I went up to a tall gangly black boy who had outgrown his windbreaker by six inches and said politely, "Can you tell me if Jasper Jones is around?"

He treated me to a long thoughtful stare before he replied, "Who wants to know?" He wasn't being arrogant or nasty, just cautious.

"I'm from the public library and Jasper has an overdue book I want to collect," I said. "Is he here?"

"Yeah," said the boy in the windbreaker, making up his mind. He turned and shouted toward the players, "Hey, Jazz! Guy to see you!" I could feel the hostility around me subside.

The youngster who responded to this summons was small for his age. He had a shock of black unruly hair, a thin face with a pointed chin, and two of the brightest blue eyes I've ever seen. The eyes were older than the kid. He said to the tall black boy who had called him out of the game, "Go in for me, will you, George?" I thought Jasper's team would benefit by the change. For tall George was obviously better equipped as a basketball player than this short eleven-year-old that faced me.

He was panting a little from his recent exertions on the basketball court. He led me away from the other kids a few steps and said, "Yeah? You want me?" His blue eyes looked me over.

"If you're Jasper Jones, I do. I came to get a library book from you, Jasper."

"Call me Jazz," he said cockily. "Everybody does." Then, "A library book?" he repeated. "I never saw you before, did I?"

"Not that I know of. What difference does that make? I still

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have to collect the library book from you. It's four weeks overdue." I showed him my library identification card.

"Oh!" he said. In some curious way his steady blue eyes seemed to be reassessing me. "Overdue? What's the name of the book, Mister? You must be wrong. I never keep a book out too long."

"We sent you an overdue notice, Jazz. Didn't you get it?"

He looked blank. "Nope. I suppose Mom didn't bother telling me. Anyway, what's the book?"

I said, "*The Robber of Featherbed Lane*. Remember it?"

He shook his head. "Naw. I read 'em so fast I don't even bother to look at their names, half the time."

"Well," I said, letting some of my impatience show, "I've come all the way out here to get that book, Jazz, so let's go back to your place and find it, huh?"

Jasper looked over my shoulder into the distance. "No use going to my place," he said uncomfortably. "It's not there."

"How do you know till you look?"

"I just know, that's all, man." He raised his eyes to mine.

"That's no answer. How do you know?"

He frowned in thought. At length he said, "I guess I'll have to tell you." His expression was half hang-dog belligerent, half proud. "I've got this little business going on the side with your library books, man, and that particular book—"

I interrupted him. "A little business on the side? What kind of business? Are you *selling* our library books?"

He was scornful. "You're not too sharp, are you, Mister? If I was selling your crummy books, how come none of 'em ever turned up missing before?"

He had me there. "So what is this business of yours?" I asked.

"I don't sell your books, I rent them," explained Jasper Jones blandly.

I couldn't keep from grinning at him. A rental library operated by an 11-year-old businessman with somebody else's books was something I'd never run into before. I said as severely as I could, "You mean you rent all those books you get from the public library to other kids?"

"Sure." Unrepentant. "After I've read 'em myself, why not?"

"Can't they apply for library cards and borrow their own books—free?"

"I save 'em a lot of time and trouble by letting 'em read mine. They pay me a nickel apiece and promise to put 'em in the library

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book-drop before the date on the card. And that saves *me* a lot of trouble. I don't have to keep track of the dates and return 'em myself."

"Some racket," I said. "Do you make much money at it?"

He beamed. "I made enough the last coupla years to buy me that set of wheels over there." He pointed proudly at the almost new bicycle leaning against the fence. There was a big book bag on the flat luggage rack above the rear wheel. Jasper, suddenly cautious, asked anxiously, "It's okay for me to do that, isn't it? Rent library books, I mean? Long as the books are back on time?"

I laughed. "As far as I know, there's no law against lending—or renting—public library books to other people besides the cardholder. Always providing, of course, the library gets its books back in good shape." I fixed him with a stern look. "Which brings us back to *The Robber of Featherbed Lane*. Do you know which of your—ah—customers you rented that one to?"

"Yeah." He hesitated. "Solly Joseph. That's why I didn't tell you. Solly's the class behind me at school. And Solly's old man got drunk and tore your library book all to pieces because he didn't want Solly reading anything about robbers, see?" Jasper sighed heavily. "So I guess I got to pay for the book, right?"

"Right," I said. "Or your mother or father or somebody."

He said, "I'll pay for it myself. Mom never has any bread. She's only working part time. And my old man went off somewhere a coupla years ago."

"Okay," I said. "Three fifty. Kids' books run kind of high these days. I'm sorry."

"Forget it," he said with a chopping gesture. "I'll collect it from Solly, don't worry." He took an old-fashioned coin purse from his jeans, opened it, and counted out $3.50 into my hand—two one-dollar bills and the rest in small change. "Is that it?"

"That's it." I grinned at him. He was quite a kid. "Now you better get back in that basketball game, Jazz. Your friend George just missed an easy layup."

Everybody at the library got a big kick out of my story about Jasper Jones and his book-rental operation. And about Solly Joseph's old man getting drunk and destroying one of our children's books because it might have a bad influence on Solly. Olive Gaston, head children's librarian, was especially amused. "That little Jasper Jones goes out of here every Saturday morning as regular as clockwork," she said, "with so many books in his book-

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bag he can hardly carry it. So *that's* why he takes so many. He rents them. He always tells me it's because he's such a fast reader."

I turned in the kid's $3.50 along with the day's fines, and forgot about Jasper Jones until several weeks later when Lieutenant Randall, my former boss at the Police Department, brought the incident back to mind.

We were having a pizza and beer together in Tony's Diner, having met there at Randall's suggestion. He made it clear, however, that I was not his guest; I could pay for my own pizza out of the princely salary the library paid me for being what he called a "sissy" cop. Randall has never forgiven me for leaving him and the Department and seeking a more literate, not to mention more literary, association.

I started on my pizza and opened with my usual query, "Well, how many murders did you solve today, Lieutenant?"

Normally he'll answer this with a sour glance from his spooky eyes and a contemptuous belch if he's drinking beer. Tonight, however, he replied promptly, as though on cue. "One," he said.

"One?" I raised my eyebrows. "A new record. Congratulations."

"Don't knock it," he said. "It lets me do you a little favor."

"A favor?" I stared at him. "You feeling all right?"

"I feel fine," he said, chomping on a large section of pizza to prove it.

"Then for God's sake," I said, "tell me about it."

He shrugged, obviously pleased that I'd given him the lead. "Nothing much to it," he apologized. "Routine stuff. Fellow got stabbed in a bar in a quarrel with a former girl friend about his present girl friend. He made it home and quietly bled to death. You remember that kind, don't you? From when you were a real cop?" He underlined the word *real* with his voice.

"Yeah," I said, "I remember." And I did. It made me a little homesick for Homicide, but not much.

"When they discovered the stiff about midnight," Randall went on, "they called me and I went out there. Ghetto room on South Wildflower."

"And you solved the case instantly?"

"Took about half an hour. Three witnesses in the bar saw the stabbing and could identify the stabber. We've got the murderess sewed up tight."

"Where does a favor for me come into it?" It's hard for me to

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tell, even after all these years, when Lieutenant Randall is kidding and when he's serious.

"That's the real reason I called you tonight, Hal. Kind of a curious thing, but I saw right away last night that I could do you some good."

"You going to tell me how?"

"Certainly. But answer a question first. You probably think of me as a tough, unappreciative, demanding type who asks for favors but never returns one, right?" Randall's unwinking cat's eyes gleamed in the fluorescent lights of the diner.

"Right," I agreed heartily, playing along.

"So I go out to where this fellow bleeds to death and look over the scene, and to my utter amazement," said Randall, grinning like a chimpanzee with a banana in view, "I discover something that makes me think of you immediately."

"What? Either tell me or shut up."

He took a long swallow of beer. "You wouldn't have dared talk to me that way in the old days," he complained.

"That's one reason I left you."

He wiped beer foam off his lips with a paper napkin. Then he said with dignity, "You've done me several favors since you left the Department, Hal. I'll admit it. You've helped me solve a couple of my major cases. So now I'm going to help you solve one of *your* major cases. Tit for tat. And prove that I'm not as unappreciative as you think."

"Hurry up," I said, "before I start to cry or sing 'Hearts and Flowers.' "

He grinned. "What I'm going to do for you, pal, is to save you a lot of time and trouble—and an unnecessary trip to South Wildflower Street."

I sat up. Despite himself, Lieutenant Randall was beginning to interest me. "Yeah?" I said.

"Yeah." He was enjoying himself.

"How come?"

"Well, when I got out there and the M.E. had taken a gander at the stiff, I kind of cased the dead guy's room a little bit." Randall made a face. "It was a dump. Filth, stench, a real pigsty, you know?"

I nodded. I remembered that from my cop days, too.

"But the surprise was, I found a book under the guy's bed," said Randall, smirking. "The only book in the whole joint. Like he'd

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thrown it under the bed and forgotten about it. And you know what it was?"

"A library book?" I guessed.

"Right. And I looked at the card in it, and you know something? That book was way overdue, Hal. Think of that! Overdue! That's a pretty heinous crime in library circles, I said to myself. So what did I generously decide to do? I decided to bring the book in for you, thus saving you the arduous job of tracking the damn thing down and bringing your criminal to justice!" He leaned back and made an expansive gesture.

I said, "You're all heart, Lieutenant. Where's the book?"

"I've got it. Don't fret yourself, son. But there's a couple of funny things about it that probably call for the attention of an expert book detective like yourself."

"Such as?"

"Such as the fact that it says inside the front cover of the book that it's intended for kids from ten to fourteen years old. And this murdered man of mine was twenty-seven if he was a day." Randall snickered into his beer glass.

"A kid's book? Well." I paused. "Maybe your murder victim was what we call a reluctant reader. There's no disgrace in reading kids' books, you know, even if you're grown up."

"I understand that. And you think he may have been one of your reluctant-reader types, is that it?"

"Maybe."

He shook his head solemnly. "No way, Hal. This guy was a cheap hood with a record as long as your arm. The only reading he ever did was the sports page and the racing form. And what's more, he was a junkie. Hooked like a mackerel, judging from all the mainline needle marks on him. So what's with the children's literature under the bed?"

I shrugged. "Beats me."

"No solutions from the famous book detective, Hal Johnson?"

"Not tonight," I said. "Now you've pulled your gag, let's have the book."

Right then was when I suddenly recalled my eleven-year-old friend Jasper Jones. For the book Randall handed to me over the table was *The Robber of Featherbed Lane*. I looked at him. "Was the name of your stabbing victim Joseph, by any chance?"

"Yeah. How'd you guess that? Although he was better known as Joe."

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I relaxed a little. "Joe what?"
"Joe Sabatini," Randall said.

More out of curiosity than anything else, I checked the book against our records the next day to see if it could possibly be the copy that Jasper Jones had reported destroyed by Solly Joseph's drunken father. With four or five copies of most juvenile books circulating through our library system, it was unlikely this could be Jasper Jones's overdue book.

But it was.

My first thought was that Solly Joseph had told Jasper Jones a big lie about what happened to the book he'd rented. My second thought was that if so, Jasper had probably taken $3.50 out of Solly's hide by this time. My third thought was that I ought to return Jasper's money now that our book was recovered. My fourth thought was that the fines on the book almost equaled $3.50 by now, anyway, so why bother? And my fifth thought was, belatedly enough, that maybe Jasper Jones was the one who'd been lying.

I stopped counting at that point and just let my memory of Jasper's conversation with me slosh around in my head. Right away several curious angles occurred to me that I hadn't noticed at the time. For one thing, I now found it rather puzzling that when I'd told Jasper I'd come to collect a library book from him, his initial reaction was to ask me a strange question: "I never saw you before, did I?" Then, when I'd explained it was an *overdue* library book and identified myself, his whole manner had undergone a subtle change. And while claiming not to remember *The Robber of Featherbed Lane* at first, he'd later remembered exactly what had been done to that particular book by Solly Joseph's intoxicated father.

I didn't want to believe that an eleven-year-old ghetto kid had been able to con an old pro like me so easily. But the conviction grew. During my rounds that day doubts about Jasper Jones kept nagging at me.

I got back to the library about three in the afternoon, and after sitting in my office for ten minutes, looking at the wall, I reached for the phone and dialed Gardenia Street Grade School.

I explained to the secretary in the principal's office who I was, telling her the truth. Then I embroidered it a little. "A couple of kids from your school have applied for cards at the public li-

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brary," I told her, "and we're checking them out before we issue the cards." Nonsense, of course, but the secretary didn't know that. "Would you be good enough to confirm that they're bona-fide students in your school?"

"Certainly," she said. "What are their names?"

"Jasper Jones," I said. "Probably in the fifth or sixth grade. Maybe seventh. And Solly, or Solomon, Joseph, around the fifth grade, I guess."

She went off to check their rolls and when she came back on she said, "Jasper Jones is in our sixth grade. But we have no Solly or Solomon Joseph in any grade that I can find. Does that help you?"

"Enormously," I said. "I had doubts about Joseph myself and you've confirmed them." I thanked her and hung up.

So there was no Solly Joseph in the class behind Jasper Jones at Gardenia Street School. How about that? Solly had been made up out of whole cloth for my benefit, apparently. And Solly's drunken father, too.

On my way home that evening I took *The Robber of Featherbed Lane* with me to Police Headquarters, and without stopping first at Randall's office I paid a visit to my old side-kick, Jerry Baskin, who heads up the police laboratory. I handed him the book and asked him as a personal favor to give it his best going over, and let me know if he found anything out of the way about it. And not—repeat not—to say anything about it to anyone at the Department until I gave him the word.

He agreed, for old times' sake. And for the fifth of J & B Scotch which just happened to be peeking out of my carcoat pocket. "What am I supposed to be looking for?" Jerry asked me, uncapping the Scotch and taking a luxurious sniff of its rich aroma.

"Anything," I said. "Or nothing. I don't know. But give it your best shot, will you?"

"Okay," said Jerry. "I'll call you."

He called me the following afternoon. "Your library book, Hal," he said without preamble, "I found something."

"What?" I asked.

"Traces of heroin in the card pocket."

"Heroin?" My heart gave a sickening lurch. "You sure?"

"Mexican, I'd guess. Not enough to analyze for quality. But definitely heroin, Hal."

"I was afraid of that." I paused, thinking. I wanted to be sure. I

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said, "Will you give some other books the same treatment for me, Jerry?"

"Why not?" Jerry said. "At a bottle of Scotch per book, what can I lose?"

I went to the children's library and took from the shelves half a dozen of the books borrowed by Jasper Jones and recently returned. Olive Gaston dug them up for me without comment and I took them over to Jerry Baskin. With only one more bottle of J & B, however, not half a dozen. I can't afford to be a spendthrift on my anemic library expense account.

Jerry reported his findings on the additional books two days later: three of the six books I'd given him showed traces of heroin in the card pockets. "Anything else?" I asked him.

"A shred of glassine paper in one card pocket, Hal."

That's when I went to see Lieutenant Randall. Facing him across his scarred desk, I said, "You remember that library book you found under Joe Sabatini's bed?"

"What about it?"

I told him the whole story. Throughout my recital he didn't move, he didn't blink his cat's eyes once. I finished up by saying morosely, "I'm sure the kid isn't on smack himself. So all I can come up with is that he's a pusher. That he's not renting library books to his pals, but passing them out to his customers with packets of heroin in the card pockets. What's more innocent-looking than a kid's library book? This is an eleven-year-old kid, Lieutenant! I can't believe it!"

Randall lit a cigarette. "You've been out of touch too long, Hal. Messing around with your library books. The Narc boys are arresting kids as young as Jasper Jones every day. Didn't you know that?"

"No."

"They are. And even younger. The kids are recruited to the drug trade primarily because they *are* kids, Hal. Juveniles. If they get caught possessing or selling heroin, they're treated leniently by the courts as juvenile delinquents. But if *adults* get caught doing the same thing, they get a mandatory life sentence under state law. See how it works? The kids run all the risks of handling the dope while their bosses, the older pushers, just hang around on the edges, picking up the money and dodging that life sentence. They call the kids their 'runners' or 'holders.' And half the time the kids don't even realize what they're doing."

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I remembered Jasper Jones's old-young blue eyes and the facility with which he had improvised the story about Solly Joseph. "I'm afraid my kid knows what he's doing," I said.

"Well, they all know they're doing something not quite legal, put it that way. But they usually don't realize the enormous street value of the stuff they're handling. Most of them work for peanuts, or a new bike, or for kicks, or because somebody they admire—like an older pusher, say—asks them to."

I could understand how that would happen. The pusher's a big man in the neighborhood. He wears fancy clothes, drives luxury automobiles, is always flashing money. The kids look up to him, want to be like him. They gladly do what he asks. I said, "So the kids take the heat? And the adult pushers go free?" I felt very depressed.

Randall nodded. "Usually."

"Lieutenant," I said grimly, "will you do me a favor? A real one this time?"

"Another?" Randall smiled tightly. "What did you have in mind?"

"I want you to turn my Jasper Jones information over to the Narcotics Squad downstairs for action. But I'd like you to insist on one thing for me to Lieutenant Logan: that they identify and get the goods—possession, peddling, the works—on Jasper's adult pusher before they arrest Jasper Jones."

Randall said, "I guess I can promise you that much, Hal."

A couple of weeks later, after the Narcs had wrapped it up, Randall bought me a pizza and told me how they did it.

"It wasn't too tough with what you gave them, Hal. To identify and locate the kid's boss, the Narcs figured their best bet was to put a tail on the kid on Saturday morning, after he'd picked up his weekly load of books at your library. They reasoned that whoever the adult pusher was, he'd certainly want his personal possession of the heroin to be as short a time as possible before handing it over to his holder. So it seemed a good bet that the pusher got his weekly supply of smack from his dealer at about the same time on Saturday morning that the kid would show up with the books to distribute it in. And that's the way it worked. The kid led them right to the pusher."

"Great!" I said. "Who was it?"

"A flashy twenty-year-old who lives in the same tenement as

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Jasper and his mother. On the top floor. Kind of a local idol with the ghetto kids. Turned out later he's Jasper's cousin."

"That's all there was to it?" I asked incredulously. "Just follow the kid and pick up his cousin?"

"Not quite. The Narcs couldn't be absolutely sure the cousin was their man. The kid could have stopped to see him for any number of reasons, of course."

I nodded.

"After about fifteen minutes in his cousin's place, the kid comes out and goes back downstairs to his own pad. And believe it or not, Hal, the kid sits down and starts to read his new library books right through, one after the other. Outside in the alley, the Narc is watching him through the window. By lunchtime the kid's finished reading maybe five or six books. He puts them in his bookbag, makes himself a Dagwood sandwich—his mother was out working—and goes off to the playground down the street."

"With the bookbag?"

"With the bookbag. The Narc trailed along. When Jasper got involved in a basketball game, the tail went back to the tenement and—ah—managed to examine the library books the kid hadn't taken with him to the playground."

I said, "He had a warrant, I hope."

Randall shrugged. "Anyway, he found a glassine envelope of heroin in the pocket of every book—about a ten-dollar packet, he said. So that put the finger on the cousin with no possibility of mistake. You see? No heroin in the books when they left the library. And every book stuffed with it after Jasper's visit to his cousin."

I nodded again. "Then what?"

"Then the Narc went back to the playground and kept a cozy eye on Jasper Jones. Three times during the afternoon the kid was called out of the basketball game by men who passed him a coin and some code name, probably, and received, in return, one of Jasper's library books. The cousin never showed at all."

"Directing traffic from a distance."

"Right." Randall continued placidly. "At six o'clock it's getting dark. The kid goes home and eats dinner with his mother, who's now home from work. And that's what the pattern was like all week for Jasper Jones—passing out library books on demand to users at school, at the playground, or at home."

I shook my head. "An eleven-year-old kid!"

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"Listen," Randall said softly, "don't feel too bad about Jasper Jones. Lieutenant Logan told me that while his man was staked out at the Gardenia Street playground, he saw a guy take delivery of two bundles of smack from a little girl who was jumping rope on the sidewalk. She couldn't have been more than six or seven years old. And when this guy called to her, she rolled up the sleeve of her sweater and revealed a lot of packages of heroin taped to her arm. He took what was needed and the little girl rolled down her sleeve and went back to jumping rope."

I found myself hoping with an almost feral ferocity that somehow, some way, justice would be visited on the depraved animals who recruited little children to do their dirty work for them. I said harshly, "Did they nail Jasper's cousin?"

"Yeah. Relax."

"When did they make the arrest?"

"Last Saturday morning. The Narcs hit him after he'd got his supply from his dealer and before Jasper arrived with his library books to take it off his hands. The cousin's going up for life, Hal."

I sighed. "I hope to God he gets the whole treatment!" I hesitated. "What about the kid?"

"Jasper?" Randall's sulphur-yellow eyes held a spark of something that could have been sympathy. "Lieutenant Logan, at my request, released Jasper Jones in the custody of his mother."

Suddenly I felt fine. "Let me buy you a beer, Lieutenant."

He gave me a calm cool stare. "Gladly," he said, "and you can pay for the pizza, too, if you feel all that grateful."

I paid for the pizza.

BORROWING TROUBLE

by MARK GRENIER

If you're planning to write a new chapter in crime,
Then return all the library's volumes on time;
Or else Johnson will spot what the cops overlooked,
And you're bound to end up being printed and booked.

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a *NEW* short story by

R. L. STEVENS

Fifteen packets of $100 bills, and one hundred bills in each packet—$150,000. Helen Macon wanted three things: her freedom, her lover—and the $150,000. The question was: where was the money? . . .

THE MISSING MONEY

by R. L. STEVENS

Helen Macon's troubles began on the day she decided to kill her husband. Ironically, her troubles might have been far less if she hadn't changed her mind about it.

George Macon was a dabbler in real estate, a gruff hard-drinking man of 42 who made deals over a bar late at night. Helen would see him poring over the maps of land tracts he kept in his study and then he'd be gone for a day or two, off to Newark or Jersey City to close a deal for some rundown building that could be resold to a slumlord at a handsome profit. Helen detested his method of earning a living and it was only the money that kept her with George Macon, even at times when she knew he was spending nights with women like Liza Knapp.

Nevertheless, Helen Macon managed to live a comfortable middle-class suburban existence. There'd never been any children, but she filled her days with women's club activities and volunteer work at the hospital. It was at the hospital that she met Dr. Hugh Frankins and began an affair of her own. Frankins was recently divorced, reasonably handsome, and attracted to Helen in a way she hadn't known since high school. Suddenly, at 37, she was young again.

She went home one night in mid-summer with every intention of asking George for a divorce. As luck would have it, that was the night he chose to dump 15 packets of $100 bills on the kitchen table.

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"My God, George! What's all that money?"

"Take a look at it, sweetie. There's a hundred bills in each packet. One hundred and fifty thousand dollars in all! Ever think you'd see that much money in your life?"

"But who does it belong to?"

He chuckled and leaned back, immensely satisfied with himself. "It's mine. Every cent is mine! I just closed the deal of a lifetime."

"What sort of deal, George? What sort of deal pays off in brand-new hundred-dollar bills?"

"Don't you worry your little head about it. The money that's floating around these days you wouldn't believe."

"You stole it, didn't you, George?"

"Of course not! I told you I had to go to Atlantic City on business, and you know how it is there with the gambling casinos opening up. Some of the Las Vegas boys want to get in on the action. A choice piece of Boardwalk real estate brings a pretty penny. Lord, it reminds me of playing Monopoly when I was a kid!"

"You mean this money is all legal?"

"Well . . ." His expression turned sly. "Maybe not completely legal. I'm not about to take it down to the bank and deposit it, if that's what you mean."

"What *are* you going to do with it?"

He sat staring at the money. "They can always get a search warrant for the house or a safe-deposit box."

"The *police*?"

"Calm down, will you, Helen? Nothing's going to happen. If I go to jail some of the biggest politicians in this state would be going right along with me. All the same, I can't spend it right away and I can't bank it. And I don't want it where it can be found by searchers." *He paused a moment, then snapped his fingers.* "Hell, I'm going to bury it in the back yard!"

"The back yard!"

"Just temporarily, till I'm sure there won't be any trouble. Come on, get the flashlight and we'll do it right now."

She followed him outside, still dazed by the amount of money on their kitchen table. For the moment all thoughts of divorce had left her mind.

George Macon took the flashlight and headed for the rose garden. It was a good spot, she agreed, sheltered from the neighbors' view so no one could see him digging. And the dirt would show no

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traces afterward. He went back inside and took down a cheap plastic raincoat that had lain unworn on their closet shelf for years. He carefully wrapped the fifteen packets of currency in it, tied the bundle with string, and carried it outside. She watched while he dug a hole about two feet deep and buried the money.

"Won't it rot or something?" she asked when they were back inside.

"It won't be there that long." He turned from the sink where he was washing his hands and added, "You're the only one who knows it's there, Helen. If it's missing, I'll know who took it."

At the hospital the following afternoon Dr. Frankins found an excuse to visit the floor where she was working. "I thought you'd phone me. Did you ask him for the divorce?"

She turned an anguished face toward him. "I couldn't, Hugh. Something came up."

"I'll bet!"

She hadn't wanted to tell him about the money, but now she felt she had to. "He's come into a great deal of cash, from one of his shady real-estate deals in Atlantic City. It's more money than I've ever seen before, Hugh."

"How much?"

She took a deep breath. "One hundred and fifty thousand."

"Once I get set up in private practice I could make that in two years."

"Tax free?"

"So you're going to stay with him for the money?"

"Of course not! I'd just like to have the money and you too."

"Then steal it from him. If he got it illegally he can't report you to the police."

"He'd come after me and kill me!"

Frankins had never met George Macon but he'd heard enough about him from Helen. "Yes, I suppose he might do just that."

"Let me think about it," she said.

It was later that day the idea came to her. If George were dead, she'd have both the money and her freedom. She didn't doubt for a moment that he'd kill her if she stole the money. By killing him first she was only acting in self-defense.

She thought about the method, and decided it would have to be poison. She could never imagine herself shooting or stabbing or strangling him.

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And poison was easy to obtain in a hospital.

She began with some discreet questions put to Dr. Hugh Frankins in their moments alone together. If he suspected the reason for them, he didn't admit it. He gave her straightforward information which she filed away in her mind.

One day, while working in the pharmaceutical supply room, Helen managed to steal several capsules of a brand Hugh had mentioned. That night, while rummaging in her purse for a cigarette, he found them. They exchanged a glance, but he said nothing.

She often made George a Scotch and soda before they retired at night. It was easy to dump the contents of several capsules into the drink and stir it until they dissolved.

George took one sip and spit it out. "Good lord, Helen, what is this? It's sure not Scotch! You must have used the wrong bottle!"

"I'm sorry, dear."

She dumped it out and flushed the remaining capsules down the toilet. The next day, when she saw Hugh, she thought she detected a question in his eyes. She shook her head and said, "It didn't work. I just can't do it." He said no more about it.

During the following week George had a number of business meetings in the evening, including at least two with a mysterious man named Harker. She expected any evening he would return home with another bundle of currency, but none appeared. She wondered if the meetings with Harker were really excuses to be with Liza Knapp again. He hadn't mentioned her in months, which was all the more reason for suspicion.

On Friday night he came home late, complaining of chest pains. It was obvious he'd been drinking, and she thought little of it. But by the following morning he was seriously ill. She phoned their family doctor and he agreed to meet them at the hospital emergency ward. When he'd examined George he came out and said, "We're running some tests. It looks like a mild heart attack to me, Helen." Mild—but his face was grave.

She left the hospital and drove home. The first thing she did was to dig up the spot in the rose garden where he'd buried the money.

It wasn't there.

Helen dug an ever-widening hole until she'd covered half of the rose garden. The money was gone.

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Trying not to think about it, she drove back to the hospital. By the time she got there, she was in a near panic. That much money! She couldn't lose it—not now!

Had she told anyone where the money was hidden? No, not even Hugh.

Only George himself could have dug it up.

She prayed for the first time in years, prayed that he'd stay alive.

Her doctor was in the hall near the intensive-care unit. "You can see him for just a moment, Helen. I have to tell you he's not good."

Her throat was dry as she stood by the side of the bed looking down at him. He opened his eyes and said, "Hello, sweetie."

"George—George, can you hear me? The money is gone from the rose garden!"

His eyes closed but then opened again. "I know . . . dug it up and hid it in the house."

"Where, George? *Where?*"

". . . You'll find it . . . when you need it."

"George!"

But his eyes closed again and he seemed to be sleeping. Finally, when the nurse came, Helen went outside to sit and wait.

There was a bustling of doctors then, and an emergency team arrived with some sort of heart machine. She knew they were working over him, but they wouldn't let her see.

It was her own doctor who told her, 20 minutes later, that George Macon was dead.

She began even before the funeral.

She searched the bedroom first, going through his closet and the suitcases he occasionally used. Then she tackled his basement workshop, where he hadn't been in months. She pawed through a pile of scrap lumber, examined the storage shelves of the fruit cellar, and even looked inside the sleeping furnace, all without success.

On the day of the funeral, after they'd returned home, she confessed her despair to Hugh Frankins. "He said the money was in the house somewhere. He said I'd find it when I needed it. But I've torn the place apart without finding it!"

"Calm down, Helen, and let's reason this out. After all, George is dead and we've got each other. Isn't that what we wanted?

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We've got the rest of our lives to find that money."

But he went at it with at least as much vigor as Helen. Working together they searched each room of the house, including those Helen had already gone through. In the kitchen they even unwrapped large packages of frozen food to make sure they didn't contain cold cash. In George's study they removed his scores of rolled maps and checked the niches behind them. In the garage Hugh slid beneath the car and inspected it for suspicious-looking bulges. Even the attic crawl-space was probed, and the loose insulation removed and then replaced.

By the third day Hugh Frankins was ready to give up. "It's not here, Helen. The money's simply not here."

"There must be places we haven't looked yet. How about the chimney?"

"He wouldn't be foolish enough to hide money in the chimney. It would burn up!"

"Not in the summer. Come on, let's look."

But there was nothing in the chimney except last winter's soot.

"Satisfied?" he asked.

"No. George was a home handyman—or at least he used to be. He could have built a secret panel somewhere, or taken up some floorboards and then replaced them. He could have done a thousand things, Hugh!"

And so they started searching again. Rugs were taken up and walls were tapped. Even the ceiling panels were removed. But again they found nothing. Tired and sweating, Hugh Frankins paused to light a cigarette. "Let's face the truth. He lied to you, Helen."

"I can't believe that!" She couldn't believe it, but she had a growing fear that it was true.

"What about this girl you mentioned—Liza something?"

"Liza Knapp."

"Could he have taken the money to her?"

"Why?"

"Because he trusted her more than he did you?"

She remembered George's face as he spit out the drink she'd prepared for him. Could he have been suspicious? Could that have prompted him to dig up his back-yard treasure and deliver it into the hands of his mistress?

"All right," she decided. "I'll go see her."

"And do what?"

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"Find out if she has the money."

"Do you expect her to tell you?"

Helen was working herself into a rage. "Of course she'll tell me—I'll make her! That money belongs to me! He was married to me, not to that little tramp!"

"Calm down and think about it a bit. If she's got the money she's not likely to admit it to you. We need a plan of some sort."

"What kind of plan?"

He thought about it. "I'll go with you, but I'll wait in the car. If you have trouble with her, maybe I can make her think it's a police matter and scare her a little."

The following day they drove to the apartment building where Liza Knapp resided in surprising luxury. Helen was prepared to credit the surroundings to the favors of male friends, though she knew Liza had maintained a successful real-estate business for a number of years.

The woman, only a few years younger than Helen but looking still in her twenties, was just going out. She paused at her apartment door, key in hand, and turned a questioning gaze at Helen, as if trying to remember who she was. "Did you want me? I was just leaving."

"I'm Helen Macon, George's widow. We met at a realtors' dinner once."

"Oh! Yes, I remember. I was terribly sorry to hear about your husband. I always liked George."

"I'd like a few words with you, Miss Knapp."

"I was just—" She saw the set expression on Helen's face and appeared to change her mind. "Oh, all right. Come in for five minutes."

Helen followed her inside and got right to the point. "George gave you a package before he died. I want it back."

"Package? Mrs. Macon, I hadn't seen your husband for six months before he passed away. Honestly!"

"I know you were sleeping together."

Liza Knapp bristled. "Now look here, Mrs. Macon, I'm very sorry about your husband but that's no reason for you to come here with these accusations! Whatever went on between George and me was over long ago."

"I want that package, Miss Knapp. I want the money."

"Money?"

"Or I'll call the police right now."

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"I don't know what you're talking about. I suggest you leave before I lose my temper."

"Very well. You've been warned."

Helen left the apartment and went down to the car where Hugh was waiting. He listened to her and said, "All right, I'll give her a little scare."

A few minutes later, when Liza Knapp came downstairs, Hugh intercepted her while Helen trailed behind. "Miss Knapp? I'm Sergeant Rogers from police headquarters. I'm trying to locate a missing package of money that Mrs. Macon here says you have in your possession."

"Police?" Liza Knapp stared uncertainly. "What is all this? Let's see your identification."

Hugh took out an official-looking card that he'd prepared earlier. "I don't want to have to take you downtown, Miss Knapp. If you'll just surrender the package—"

"I have no package, Sergeant Rogers. That is your name, isn't it?"

"We have information that George Macon brought you a package of money about a week before he died. This is a very serious business, Miss Knapp. If you surrender the package now I think I can keep your name out of it. Otherwise—"

"I have no package, Sergeant. How many times do I have to tell you that?" She brushed past him and walked to her car.

"Well," Helen said, "that didn't work so well."

"Maybe she's telling the truth."

Helen watched Liza Knapp drive away. "But if she doesn't have the money, where is it?"

"George told you he got the money through some deal involving casino gambling at Atlantic City. Maybe he tried his luck and lost it all gambling."

Helen shook her head vigorously. "George never gambled in his life. He certainly wouldn't have started now, and lost all that money in a short time."

"Then what do we do?"

She shrugged. "Go back to the house and search some more."

They were at it again into the evening, getting nowhere, when a car pulled up outside. Helen stepped off the porch to greet a stocky middle-aged man who walked as if his feet hurt.

"Mrs. Helen Macon? I'm Donovan, Police Department." He

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showed her a badge and I.D., and Helen felt slightly faint. "We have a complaint from a Miss"—he consulted his notebook "—Liza Knapp that you've been harassing her for money."

"That's not—"

"She further states that a man posing as a police officer accompanied you."

Hugh had come to the door when he heard the voices, and Helen knew the detective had seen him. "Look, Mr. Donovan—"

"Lieutenant Donovan. You see, Miss Knapp called us to check this out, and we don't have a Sergeant Rogers." His eyes went up to Hugh standing in the doorway. "That wouldn't be you, would it, sir?"

"I'm Dr. Hugh Frankins, a friend of the family."

"I see." The detective made a note in his book. "Well, maybe Miss Knapp can identify the man who posed as a police officer."

Hugh cleared his throat. "I was there with Mrs. Macon. She may have gotten the mistaken impression that I was with the police."

Lieutenant Donovan nodded. "I think we'd better go inside and talk this over."

Helen hesitated. "The house is a mess. My husband—"

"I know. Your husband died last week. I'm very sorry." He started up the front steps and Helen could see there was no way to keep him out of the house without arousing his suspicions.

"You seem to have been checking up on me," she said, holding open the door for him.

Donovan ignored the comment and glanced around at the pulled-up floorboards and out-of-place ceiling panels. "Looks as if you two have been searching for something."

"It's my house," Helen pointed out.

"That's true."

She exchanged a look with Hugh and then said, "It's no big mystery. I'll tell you exactly what it's all about. My husband was cheating a little on his taxes. Everyone does, you know. He had a few thousand dollars put away and now I can't find it."

"You think he gave it to this Knapp woman?"

"Yes, I do."

His eyes roamed the room. "Well, it looks to me as if you're looking for something a lot bigger than a few thousand dollars."

"That's all it was," Helen insisted.

The door to George's study was opposite them, and Donovan

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stepped inside. "If that's all it was, it could be hidden in his little desk here, and that looks untouched."

"We've searched it," Helen assured him.

The detective pulled out a stack of rolled maps from its niche. "What are these?"

"Maps and charts of land tracts. My husband was in the real-estate—" Her mouth stayed open but no words came out. She was staring at the map Donovan had started to unroll, watching the hundred-dollar bills fluttering from it.

"We never unrolled the maps!" Hugh said, half to himself. "We looked behind them, but we never unrolled them."

The detective pulled out more maps and more hundred-dollar bills cascaded to the floor. "Looks like a lot more than a few thousand here," he commented.

Helen felt the room starting to spin. "It was in a bundle, so we searched for a bundle. I never thought he'd separate them to hide them this way."

Hugh Frankins moved then, grabbing the maps from Donovan's hands. "You're here without a search warrant, Lieutenant. You had no right to look at these."

The detective shrugged. "It's your money. I have no intention of taking it." He smiled slightly. "Unless you want to give me a reward for finding it."

"Are you asking for a bribe?"

Donovan snorted. "Not at all! I didn't come here looking for money."

"Why did you come?" Helen asked.

"Well, Miss Liza Knapp has made some pretty serious charges against you, Mrs. Macon. When she learned you were looking for this money she remembered your husband complained to her that his drinks weren't tasting right."

"I knew he'd been seeing her!" Helen announced triumphantly.

"Miss Knapp thinks you might have poisoned your husband for this money."

"That's insane!"

Donovan nodded. "I'm sure it is, but we're going to have to request a disinterment so we can do an autopsy. I know the death certificate says he died of a heart attack, but there are certain poisons around which produce that effect. And you *do* work at a hospital, Mrs. Macon."

"Go ahead!" she told him. "Dig up George. You won't find a

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thing!" She was more concerned with the money on the floor, and the rest of it still in those rolled-up maps.

"I just wanted to let you know," Donovan said. "I'd advise you not to leave town till the autopsy is completed."

"I'm not going anywhere. Except to the door, to see you out."

When she came back to the study, Hugh was sitting in George's old chair, staring at the bills on the floor. "Help me pick them up," she said. "Come on!"

"Helen . . ."

"What is it?"

"Helen, we've got a problem."

She started scooping up the bills herself. "You mean the taxes on this? I suppose that detective will report it to somebody, but he didn't see how much there is."

"Not the taxes, the autopsy."

She looked up at him. "I told you I couldn't do it, Hugh. I didn't poison him. He died of a heart attack."

"I know you didn't poison him. But when you couldn't do it I phoned him, posing as a man named Harker who was interested in real estate. I met him twice for drinks."

"*Hugh!*"

"You didn't poison him, Helen, but I did."

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a *NEW* detective story by

CHARLES PETERSON

It is always good fun to publish a humorous detective story—we need humor these days, lots of it. "Crime without tears," to paraphrase a fine old comment by one of our early mystery critics, says it all in three words. In any event, here is the Case of the Corpse in the Kitchen of Dave's Dandy Diner, the chuckling tale of what reporter McAlester referred to as "Murder on the Menu" . . .

THE GREAT BLUEBERRY PIE HEIST

by CHARLES PETERSON

Contrary to what you may have gathered from McAlester's newspaper story, the corpse in the kitchen of Dave's Dandy Diner did not die from eating one of our blueberry pies, even though he was found with his face in the pie plate. It was the knife in the back that did it. Our blueberry pies have been and continue to be above reproach, and the next time that reporter shows himself around the diner he's likely to get one right in the—

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

I'm Dave Decker, co-owner with John Wilkerson of Dave's Dandy Diner, which used to be Cafferty's Cosy Café. A few weeks before this foofaraw began, we bought it from the widow Cafferty—lock, stock, barrel, and good will, if any—figuring that with its location near the university and some hard work on our part we ought to be able to make a buck or two.

In fact, we'd already made one, and I'd had it framed. I got the idea from Mrs. Cafferty. On the day we took over she was showing us around and tearfully pointed out the first dollar Cafferty ever made, framed and hung above the door leading to the

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kitchen. She may have been tearful because it was not so much hung as glued to the wall, thereby preventing her from taking it along to Sun City with the rest of the community property. I deduced from some of her remarks that the Caffertys' marriage was neither of long standing nor especially blissful.

Anyway, I thought it would be kind of neat to preserve our first dollar, too, and this particular morning I was about to hang it. It was shortly after four A.M. and John was polishing tables in the booths, an operation that always seemed to remind him of that tune from *H.M.S. Pinafore* about polishing up the handle on the big front door, which he was singing in his nondescript but enthusiastic baritone.

"Hey, John!" I said. "Let's have an executive decision here. Where shall we hang this? Over Cafferty's or alongside?"

John paused in his aria, squinted, and considered. "Alongside," he decided. So I drove in the nail and hung it alongside.

About 20 minutes later I was working behind the counter and John was doing the floors. He had switched to the police sergeant's song from *The Pirates of Penzance,* regaling me with both the solo and choral responses.

"When the enterprising burglar's not a-burgling (Not a-burgling)," he sang, "When the cut-throat isn't occupied in crime ('Pied in crime), He loves to hear the little brook a-gurgling (Brook a-gurgling), And—"

At this point he was distracted by a tapping on the front door. A little man in a dark coat and brim-down hat stood there, looking rather like a damp, recently evicted house sparrow, for it was drizzling outside. Wearing an expression of mingled hope and desperation, he tapped the glass again.

"We're not open!" John cried. "Open at six o'clock!"

The little man cupped an ear, suggesting that John was not coming through.

"Not—open—till—six!" John bellowed.

The man registered deepening incomprehension.

"Oh, hell," I said. "Might's well let him in. He may dissolve if we leave him out there."

So John unlocked the door and the little man squilched in.

"Thank you so much," he said gratefully. Whereupon he pulled out a .38 revolver and said, "Would you mind stepping in the back, please?"

John gave me a you-and-your-big-ideas look and I shrugged

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back at him, knowing we shared similar views on the general inadvisability of arguing with people pointing guns.

"The cash register's over there," I said, nodding.

The little man looked shocked, almost dismayed. "Oh, dear me, no!" he protested. "I'm no robber! This is no stick-up. Into that storeroom, please."

He herded us into our little pantry, turned the key in the lock, and left us in darkness. There seemed little that we could do about it at the moment, except perhaps to inventory the canned goods, provided we could do it by the Braille system. We could hear some bustling about in the kitchen, and at one point something smashed on the floor and a voice said "Oops!" It was difficult to imagine what was going on, and our visitor having thoughtlessly left the key in the lock, it was impossible to see anything through the keyhole. At last all was quiet. I turned on the pantry light.

"Now what?" John asked, blinking.

"I guess we make like Houdini and do our celebrated escape act."

Which was no problem. We took a screwdriver from the tool kit in the pantry, fiddled briefly with the knob and lock, and were out in the kitchen in no time.

"Kind of messed up," John observed, "but nothing we can't straighten up before we open. And nothing seems to be missing."

"Look again," I said. "That little twerp stole a bunch of our pies!"

"Stole your pies?" echoed Police Officer Smedley, when he appeared in response to our call.

"Maybe he was hungry," said Police Officer Morgan, who'd appeared with Police Officer Smedley.

"What do you put in your pies?" inquired a wiry, sharp-nosed man named McAlester, from the *Daily Intelligence,* who'd appeared on the heels of Messrs. Smedley and Morgan. "Little prizes, like in Cracker Jack boxes?"

"Our pies come from Mother McGurk's Ho-Made Pie Company," said John, taking umbrage. He detected McAlester's hand inching toward a glazed doughnut and whisked it out of reach. "If you have any questions about the pies, you'll have to check 'em out with her."

Smedley wrote in his report book. "Well, we'll keep an eye open.

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If we spot any footloose pies in the neighborhood we'll send them back to you."

"I can see the story now," said McAlester, sketching imaginary headlines in the air. "*BEANERY BOYS BAFFLED BY OLD SHELL GAME*. Pie shells, that is," he amplified, noting our puzzled expressions. "See you later."

The funny thing was, Smedley and Morgan did find our pies—six of them—smashed to bits in the blocks between our place and University Avenue. It seemed our visitor, whom we had decided to call Sebastian Sweettooth, didn't care for his selection after all. John, who in addition to being a Gilbert and Sullivan freak is also a Sherlock Holmes fanatic, thought the case presented strong similarities to Holmes's problem of the Six Napoleons—one of which, he claimed, contained the Borgia Pearl—and was all for probing the rest of our stock.

I told him to finish mopping the floor.

But McAlester seemed to be thinking along the same lines, perhaps with tongue in cheek. His story in the next morning's *Intelligence* ended with:

> "From time immemorial savants and sleuths have devoted their energies to discovering what might be lurking in hash-house hash. Can it be they should have been concentrating instead on the pies in Dave's Dandy Diner?"

To which John had his own rejoinder, from *The Mikado,* about some "society offenders who might well be underground."

"The funny columnist—I've got him on the list," sang John. "And he never would be missed, he never would be missed."

He corked the larynx, folded the morning paper, and stashed it under the counter as our first customer of the day appeared—a pale nervous man with a moon face and chunky build. He sat down at the counter with the tentative air of someone invited to tea at Count Dracula's castle in Transylvania.

John attempted to put him at ease. " 'Morning! What'll it be?"

The man glanced furtively right and left. "Where's Cafferty?" he asked in a hoarse whisper, as if the former proprietor might be playing hide-and-seek.

"Mr. Cafferty has gone to that great coffee house in the sky," I said. "As of about three months ago. I'm sorry—was he a friend of yours?"

"You might say that. Kicked off, did he? What in hell did he do that for?"

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"I'm sure he intended nothing personal," John said. He tried to re-establish our relationship on a sound business footing. "What'll you have?"

"Oh, a large orange juice, coffee and toast, I guess."

I turned to pour the one; John turned to pour the other. We both turned back to find ourselves looking down the barrel of another pistol.

"On second thought," said our customer. "I'll take it in the kitchen. After you, and forget the toast."

John looked at me. "Ever notice," he asked, "how it gets harder and harder to start off each day with a smile around here?"

Our customer had a topper for that one. "Shut up," he said, locking us in the pantry.

It was a replay of the previous morning, with another roundelay of rummaging. But this time there was a variation on the theme as the clatter ceased for a moment and we heard our customer talking to someone.

"Oh, it's you," he said. Then there were some unintelligible words and the bustling sounds resumed with snatches of conversation.

"—made a nice mess of it, too!"

(*Mumble, mumble, clatter, clatter.*)

"Don't give me that—I know better!"

(*Mumble, clatter, mumble.*)

"That broad he married? Nah, he wouldn't tell her nothin'."

(*Mumble, mumble.*)

"*Oof!*"

It sounded as though he'd dropped something soft and heavy.

After that the rattles and bangs tapered off and finally, after five or ten minutes of silence, we ventured to turn on the light and repeat our escape routine.

Everything was much as it had been yesterday, with one rather glaring exception.

In the middle of the floor lay our erstwhile customer, with his face in a blueberry pie and a knife sticking out of his back. And another half-dozen pies were gone.

"At least we know this guy," said Captain Brendel of the Homicide Bureau. A whippet-lean forty-year-old with reddish hair just beginning to gray at the temples, he stopped in late that afternoon to report that our missing pies had been found in several

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locations nearby, all rudely eviscerated. "He got out of the state penitentiary just about a month ago. 'Big Spender' Spinney, they called him."

"A fast man with a buck?" I asked, having always wanted to become better acquainted with one of that type.

"With counterfeit money, yes," said Brendel. "That was his specialty—passing big chunks of phony dough. It got him ten to fifteen in the end, along with the rest of his gang. They had a trunkful of twenties that the Treasury Department could hardly tell from their own stuff."

"Wish he'd tried to pass one here," John sighed. "We'd welcome even some Monopoly money right now."

Captain Brendel laughed. "Wait till news of this gets around. You'll have the murder fans double parked at your counter, all trying to peek into your kitchen."

"But don't be surprised if they pass up the pies," said another voice. Newshound McAlester had joined the panel. "Have you ever thought of having different daily specials? Deadly Danish on Tuesdays, say? Or Toxic Tarts on Fridays?"

"McAlester," I said, "why don't you hunt up a village that's lost its idiot? There's a job waiting for you."

He grinned and wandered off, composing a story lead. " 'What grim curse pervades the seemingly innocent diner on Fifteenth Street, where pies fly off like poltergeists and murder is on the menu?' "

Our pies remained quiescent for the next few days and as Captain Brendel predicted, business at Dave's Dandy Diner picked up remarkably. (John suggested, not altogether kidding, that we ought to have a souvenir brochure for sale.) The Captain took to dropping in for coffee, and I could see that the pie problem was preying on his mind.

"Yes, we checked out Mother McGurk," he said, in answer to my question. "And all I discovered was that Mother McGurk is no mother. She's a he, and he got sore as a gumboil at the idea that there was something odd about the pies he was turning out. There's no connection we could find between the pie company and 'Big Spender' Spinney—and nobody at Ma McGurk's who resembles your little friend Sebastian."

"How about that gang Spinney belonged to?"

"I've checked them, too. He and six others were nabbed, to-

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gether with the bogus bills they were planning to pass. We think a couple of others got away. One was a Fred Codwall, who was supposed to be a passer like Spinney. Another was a man named Roberts, who was the engraving expert. The Codwall character was at large for two years, until they fished him out of the river one day, but there's never been any trace of Roberts, and they never found the plates for those twenties. The ones who were jailed have been out for anywhere from one to three months now. And behaving themselves, as far as we can tell."

"Like Spinney?"

I don't think he heard me. He stirred his coffee in a distraught manner and muttered, "If I could only figure out where those damn pies fit into this!" and added, "I guess I'll drown my sorrows in another sweet roll."

There was another pause. It was my turn to wool-gather.

"Hey!" he said, startling me out of my reverie. "I said, 'I guess I'll drown my sorrows in another sweet roll.' That's a cue for service, son."

"Sorry," I said, dishing up the Danish. "I just remembered something McAlester said the other day, and it set me wondering."

John slapped the *Daily Intelligence* down on the counter so hard that he almost put whitecaps on my coffee. "A fine partner you are!"

"Why, thank you, John," I replied. "I think you're nice, too."

"You know what I mean!" he snarled, although he has a face that's ill-equipped for snarling. "Read that!"

"That" was another McAlester story. It was headlined: *MURDER MEANS MOOLAH; DEADLY DINER TO DOUBLE,* and went on to quote David Decker, 27, owner of Dave's Dandy Diner, as saying that business had improved so markedly since The Bizarre Blueberry Murder (McAlester must've been reaching for that one) that he and his partner, John Wilkinson—

"Funny, I always thought your name was Wilkerson," I said, looking up in surprise.

"It was, until this morning's edition," said John. "Proceed."

"—and his partner, John Wilkinson, have decided on a major remodeling and expansion program that will completely change the diner's appearance as well as doubling its capacity to—"

"That's enough," John scowled. "Now, was I or was I not sup-

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posed to have some say in the operation of this here now beanery?"

"Relax, friend," I said. "You've heard of those six chimpanzees pounding six typewriters at random—that eventually they'll produce all of Shakespeare's plays? Well, just think of McAlester as a distillation of six chimpanzees, typing at random. Actually," I explained, "I fed him that information because ever since he started writing about this diner the cash register has been ringing like twelve o'clock in the carillon factory. I'm just trying to keep the chimes going."

"Oh." John didn't sound wholly convinced. "Well, I should think we'd be better off keeping a low profile for a while, in case Spinney's friends are still around. I'd hate to wind up full of cutlery, too!"

As nothing untoward occurred during the rest of the day, his nervousness gradually dissipated, and by the time we locked up at ten and started down the street, he was whistling something cheerful from *The Gondoliers,* by which I gathered that he was pretty much back to normal. I kind of hated to break the spell.

"Say, Dave," he said, when we got to the corner. "The car's this way. Why are you going that way?"

"Don't you know that people get into a rut, doing the same things the same way all the time?"

"This is getting out of a rut?" he asked, a bit later. "Going around the block?" And still later he added, "Oh, I see. You're going up the alley in back of our diner. This sure is different, Dave!"

"Well, well," I said. "Here we are at the back door of our business establishment. Let's go in very quietly and not turn on any lights, shall we?"

"I think we should always go home this way," said John. "It's so refreshing. But that would be getting into a rut, too, wouldn't it? What should we do next, now that we're both sitting here in the storeroom in the dark?"

"Let's rest for a bit and be very quiet," I recommended.

"Are you sure you're not keeping something from me, Dave?"

"Sh-h-h!"

Silence settled in like gravy congealing on a cold blue-plate special. We could hear the university clock tower strike eleven, then eleven thirty, then midnight. Traffic sounds diminished to

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the whoosh of an occasional passing car. From time to time John would whistle softly through his teeth and I would shush him. A nighthawk cried, and the back door creaked.

The back door creaked?

John's hand, clutching my arm, showed that he'd heard, too, and we held our breaths as stealthy sounds moved about our kitchen. Or tried to. It is impossible to move stealthily in our kitchen, and there was a steady obbligato of muted clinks and clanks as whoever it was poked around. And presently the sounds neared our storeroom door. It opened and a flashlight probed in at us.

"Surprise!" I said, and all hell broke loose. The intruder leaped, the flashlight hit the floor, something seared my left arm as John and I lunged out and clutched a piece of coat. It wrenched itself out of our grasp. Someone knocked over a stack of saucepans. Then the lights went on and the kitchen was full of cops and Captain Brendel's voice hollered, "Freeze!"

Everybody froze except the intruder, who kept going for the door. John yelled, reached for whatever was closest to hand, and threw it. It turned out to be a can of soup, and the intruder went down, out colder than the gravy previously referred to.

It was little Sebastian Sweettooth.

There was a lengthy silence, then John turned to me and remarked in a shaky voice, "Man, when you get out of a rut, you go all the way, don't you? Hey, you're bleeding!"

Sebastian's knife, a twin of the one lodged in Spinney, had gashed my arm in passing, and it wasn't until some rough repairs had been made that there was time for any explanations.

"I thought that story about remodeling the diner might bring him back," I told Captain Brendel. "Whatever he was looking for, he couldn't risk having some carpenter stumbling on it. I didn't think he'd try the storeroom, though, because he'd passed it up before. I was hoping he'd find what he was after, then John and I could jump him. Or your guys could," I told Brendel. "I figured you might have the diner staked out."

Brendel nodded. "Almost got you two, but I thought I'd wait and see what happened next. If our little friend wakes up I think we'll find that he's the missing engraver, Roberts."

I shook my head. "I don't think so. I think Roberts is dead—and I think you'll find him out in Forest Park Cemetery, under a

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tombstone reading 'Cafferty'."

"Cafferty?"

"I had a lot of time to think while John and I were waiting in the pantry, and it seems to me the only answer. Roberts escaped the gang roundup with his counterfeit plates, changed his name, and laid low as the owner of Cafferty's Cosy Café, waiting for the day when his pals would be sprung and they could set up the printing press again. Only his time ran out just as their sentences did, leaving them in the dark as to where the plates might be. I think either Sebastian or Spinney was detailed to look for them, and the other tried to doublecross the gang and find them on his own."

"Which was which, I wonder?"

"I'd guess Spinney was the independent. He didn't know Cafferty was dead, you see. I imagine that Sebastian found Spinney nosing around here, and that Spinney badly underestimated Sebastian's desperation—or skill with a knife."

Captain Brendel pulled his lower lip, pondering. "Yeah, I'll buy that. But we're going to have to tear this place apart for those plates."

I flexed the fingers of my damaged arm, which was beginning to throb. "Maybe not," I said. "I thought about that, too. C'mere."

We moved into the diner. "John and I went over this place pretty thoroughly before we bought it. And the only thing that seemed out of the ordinary was that—" I pointed to the frame containing Cafferty's dollar. "It's glued or soldered or epoxied right to the wall, and I asked myself why Cafferty would do that—unless he had something behind it that he didn't want disturbed, even accidentally. Let's see."

John had to chisel the frame off, but behind it was a cavity and in the cavity a plastic-wrapped bundle that Brendel seized with a whoop of delight.

"Cafferty's little joke," I said, after examining what was left of the frame. "The first dollar he ever made, helping to hide his twenty-dollar masterpiece."

"All well and good," said John, "but what about all those pies?"

"McAlester, bless his ink-stained little soul, gave me the clue to that one," I said. "Remember that headline of his about us being 'baffled by the old shell game'? Well, anybody who bets on which shell the pea is under always loses—because the pea is usually under the con man's thumb all the while. So I wondered whether

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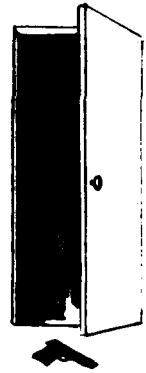
we weren't all so busy watching pies come and go that we were missing the fact that the pea was somewhere else. The pies were Sebastian's bit of misdirection for us."

"Yessir, it all adds up!" exclaimed someone else. McAlester, of course, busy scribbling on the back of an envelope just like the big city reporters in the movies.

And of course the story came out headlined: *INTELLIGENCER REPORTER'S TIP SOLVES THE CASE OF THE PERILOUS PIES!*

Perilous pies? As I said, just wait till he shows up around here again!



CRIMINALIMERICK

LEAVE IT TO JANE

by D. R. BENSEN

The reader who chooses to carp'll
Find fault with the tales of Miss Marple;
For her so-quiet life
With murders is rife,
And other crimes equally harple.

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A *NEW* short story by

LIBBY MacCALL

Old Mrs. Henderson was on very good terms with God—she talked to him nearly every day. And what she wanted of God—well, it wasn't the usual thing one asks for oneself . . .

MRS. HENDERSON TALKS TO GOD

by LIBBY MacCALL

Old Mrs. Henderson had talked to God about her trouble innumerable times before, but there was no harm in having another try. Although she was well aware that He was omniscient and knew everything, she thought it a good idea to remind Him of what had been happening—or to be more accurate, what had not been happening. After all, He did have more important things to think about than how her life had dwindled down.

When old Mrs. Henderson talked to God, she sat in her low armchair, comfortably certain that He would not have wished her to kneel on her arthritic knees. You know, God, she told Him, it isn't as if I'd ever had a very exciting life. With me, my family, the church, a few friends, and an exciting detective story were always enough. After Arthur (Senior) passed on—may his soul rest in peace—You know I did my best to accept Your will. Everyone said I made a good adjustment to being a widow. It wasn't easy, but I tried hard to count my blessings and be content with what I had. And in those days I still had a lot of blessings to count.

The blessings to which old Mrs. Henderson referred were the daily phone call from her daughter to which she could look forward every morning, and the weekly family Sunday dinner, including the drive in her son-in-law's car, first to church, then to dinner, at which bright, cheerful young people made interesting

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conversation. During the week, her grandchildren had dropped in frequently to tell her of the bad things that happened to them, as well as the good. They knew they could count on her to be always and uncritically on their side. Young Arthur had always said that she was the only one who really understood him. His parents weren't fair; they were much too hard on him, he told her.

The old lady was sure none of the grandchildren realized that she had a favorite. She had never had a son, and her feeling for Arthur, the youngest grandchild, could only be characterized as over-indulgent. A charming boy with huge gray eyes rimmed in incredible lashes, he had progressed from conning her out of too many cookies to graciously worded requests for small loans, "just till I get my allowance." Loans that were never repaid.

"Mother! You spoil them!" her daughter used to protest. With a complacent chuckle old Mrs. Henderson had replied, "That's what grandmothers are for!"

Old Mrs. Henderson massaged her aching knees with hands distorted by arthritis. If only the two granddaughters hadn't moved so far away when they got married, she continued. It isn't that I don't appreciate the pictures of the great-grandchildren. Pictures can't sit on my lap. And You know, God, that most of my old friends have passed away. Those who are left write from Florida, listing their newest ailments.

When her daughter and son-in-law perished in that hideous accident, old Mrs. Henderson would have collapsed, if it hadn't been for Arthur. For his sake she forced herself to keep going. Arthur was actually accused of having something to do with his parents' death. "Held on suspicion as a material witness" was the way the newspapers put it. They had to let him go, of course, since there wasn't the least bit of proof. He was suspected only because he had been badly in need of money and stood to inherit a good deal. Not that it had done him much good. He had lost it all, but that had been entirely his partner's fault.

The dear boy hasn't quite found himself, old Mrs. Henderson told God. He'd be much better off in a business of his own, but it's so hard to get hold of the capital to start one. I'd be glad to give him the money, but the little I can spare isn't enough. What he needs is the principal, which of course he'll have when I die.

And that's what I want to talk to You about. It's past time for me to do just that. I'm too old. My knees ache and my fingers

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ache, and all I do is sit here waiting for You to call me. But You don't call! If it weren't a sin to take one's own life, I'd hurry things along. I know I mustn't do that, but it can't be a sin to wish that my life would end.

She did wish it, with all her heart. Old Mrs. Henderson wasn't afraid of dying. After all, she was on very good terms with God, and comfortably certain that, whatever heaven was like, there would be no arthritis there, and no loneliness.

Couldn't You just reach down and stop my heart? she asked. I'd be very grateful.

Her heart gave no sign of faltering. She sighed, and returned to the detective novel she was reading. In crime books people were constantly being poisoned, stabbed, shot, disposed of in all sorts of exotic ways. It was too bad that there wasn't a single person who wished to dispose of her. How do you go about getting yourself murdered when you haven't an enemy in the world?

Most old women who were helped into their graves met their fate because someone needed the inheritance and couldn't wait for a natural death. Her own will had been made years ago, leaving one-quarter of her stocks and bonds to each of the two granddaughters, and one half to Arthur. She rationalized this favoritism by reminding herself that the girls would have all the family silver and pictures. No use looking to her grandchildren to help her out of this world. Arthur often said, "I don't know what I'd do without you, Gran!" And they were the only ones who stood to gain by her death.

Well, God, she said, concluding the talk, people are always saying the Lord helps those who help themselves. If You won't help me, then I must help myself.

But how?

Old Mrs. Henderson decided that there was only one way. She must manufacture an executioner, someone who had reason to think he or she would inherit under the terms of her will. (She wouldn't actually change the will, just lead the designated murderer to believe she had done so.)

But who?

After thinking it over for several days, discarding several ideas as too farfetched, she found a solution that pleased her. She would hire a companion. Later, feigning devotion and gratitude, she would tell the woman that she was being generously remembered in her will.

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She realized that the average companion did not have it in her to commit murder. The woman would have to be very carefully chosen.

That very day old Mrs. Henderson telephoned her ad to the newspaper. "Companion for elderly widow. Live in. Own room. TV. Limited cooking."

The next few days were eventful ones, so much so that by evening old Mrs. Henderson was utterly spent. More than a dozen of the many women who telephoned seemed worth interviewing in person. Most proved to be elderly widows themselves, gentle, kindly women, who would think twice before treading on a cockroach.

And then came Ludmilla Wiskidensky. Old Mrs. Henderson took an instant dislike to the grossly fat woman, whose face reminded the old lady of a bowl of yeast dough left to rise in a dusty room. Its color was a sooty gray, and the features embedded in the doughy mass looked like things dropped into the bowl by a careless cook, the eyes a couple of oversized raisins, the nose a swollen candied cherry.

No, said the applicant, not Mrs. *Miss* Wiskidensky. Just call her Millie. Their hair-raising escape from Poland had ruined her mother's health, she went on, so she had devoted her life to caring for her mother and had never married. (Old Mrs. Henderson was sure no one had ever asked her.) Millie sketched a few highlights of the escape, then moved on to her mother's lengthy final illness. Her eyes filled with tears as she explained that, without her mother's Social Security checks, she couldn't keep their apartment, and so must find a live-in job. Burying her mother suitably had used up all her savings.

That was all the old lady needed to hear. Here was the woman she'd been seeking: badly in need of money, and ruthless. (The escape from Poland had included some quite bloody deeds.) She knew the next few months would be unpleasant. She'd have to allow time to pretend to grow fond of the woman before she could announce her intention of leaving her money, but it would be worth it. Life was insupportable. And Arthur needed the capital. He'd miss her dreadfully, of course, but once he had made his place in the business world, he was sure to find a nice girl.

Had it not been for her little talks with God, old Mrs. Henderson wouldn't have been able to bear up under the new regime.

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She'd like me to be a complete invalid, she told Him. I do need help tying my shoes these days, but I'm still able to decide which dress to wear. Millie must have made her mother's life a misery!

It's not just her bossiness I mind, You know, she went on. I could stand that, if only she and Arthur got along.

During the week, when old Mrs. Henderson and Millie were alone, they dined together, but the antagonism between her and Arthur soon developed to a point where her presence at Sunday dinner could no longer be tolerated. When Millie served herself lavishly to third helpings of her good Polish dishes, Arthur talked of the high cost of food these days. (Millie had explained to old Mrs. Henderson that her huge appetite and consequent vast bulk—which she referred to as overweight—was due to the years of semi-starvation she had endured.)

Millie monopolized the conversation, relating gory episodes from the saga of her escape. Arthur had turned pale as she described how she had strangled an innocent boy she thought *might* be going to report her. When he urged Millie to be quiet, saying she was spoiling his appetite, she replied that at least she had done no harm to her own flesh and blood. At this point the old lady had had no choice but to banish her from the table.

After she had lumbered out of the room, Arthur urged his grandmother to find a new companion. "Honestly, Gran," he had said, "I worry about you, alone with that monster. She's dangerous! Promise me you'll get rid of her?"

When the old lady asked him to lower his voice, lest Millie hear him in the kitchen, he replied, "Good! Maybe she'll quit. Then we can go back to eating in peace. I don't mind TV dinners." (Old Mrs. Henderson had once served him delicious repasts, for she had been a good cook until her arthritis became disabling and she had had to resort to frozen meals.)

It was impossible to explain to Arthur why she continued to employ Millie. But he was right that the situation had become unbearable. She decided the time had come to tell the woman of the mythical legacy she was to receive. Only last Sunday, Arthur had described to her a remarkable opportunity he'd been offered to buy a franchise in the vending-machine business, in which a fortune was to be made if only he could raise the capital for the initial investment. At least, she was able to assuage his immediate financial difficulty by "lending" him $200 to save him from being evicted from his apartment.

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During the week the old lady spiced her conversation with descriptions of the various ways of murdering old ladies with which she was familiar from the many detective stories she had read. Millie pretended to disapprove, but old Mrs. Henderson felt satisfied that she had taken it all in. Millie was a poor actress. She had also pretended to have no particular interest in the promised legacy, but the old lady had not been fooled.

That same week an old friend who had moved to Florida dropped in for a visit. The friend, unused to northern winters, had contracted a nasty cold, which old Mrs. Henderson proceeded to catch. When Arthur arrived for his Sunday visit, he found her in bed, propped up on three pillows, wheezing and gasping. He had been pounding the pavements, he said, trying to get together enough money to secure the franchise.

"But I mustn't worry you when you're sick." He smiled his bewitching smile, and patted her hand. "Has the Fat Slob been taking good care of you?"

When Millie brought the old lady a steaming cup of chicken soup, Arthur took it out of her hand, insisting that he was in charge of the sickroom for the day. His dinner, Millie protested, was waiting for him in the dining room. It would wait for him, Arthur replied, herding her toward the door.

"The Fat Slob is jealous of me!" he laughed, coming back to sit on the edge of the bed. "Gran, promise me you'll fire her as soon as you're over this cold."

"Ssh! She heard you," whispered Mrs. Henderson. She knew the woman must still be standing just outside the half-open door: one couldn't miss hearing her heavy tread going back to the kitchen.

"Who cares?" Arthur began to feed his grandmother the soup, coaxing her to take "just one more spoonful! Come on, now!" The old lady gazed up into his beautiful eyes, admiring the long dark lashes for the thousandth time.

"This is quite a switch," Arthur said. "Remember when you used to feed me strained soup?"

"Serve you right if I blew chicken soup in your face," she wheezed. "That's what you used to do to me."

"Stop laughing at once!" he commanded. "It's making you cough."

When she finally managed to get her breath, she lay back on her pillows, exhausted. "Oh, Arthur," she whispered, "I'm so use-

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less. If only I could die! Why doesn't the Lord call me?"

Millie came hurrying in, to scold Arthrur for tiring her patient. He must leave at once, she said.

"Okay, okay! I'm going!" Arthur stooped to kiss his grandmother. "I'll eat her old Pole-ski mess-ski and then take off," he said, not bothering to lower his voice. "Call you tomorrow."

Old Mrs. Henderson woke to find something soft being pressed gently but firmly over her face.

Her lungs were clamoring for air. She put up her hands to push away whatever it was that interfered with her breathing, then dropped them back to her sides as understanding flooded in on her. Her plot was now working as she had intended. She was being murdered!

Old Mrs. Henderson began a final prayer. Soon it would all be over. In her weakened condition it couldn't take more than a few moments.

Suddenly the pillow was snatched away. She drew in her breath with a harsh, rasping sound. So she was not going to die, after all. What could have happened to make Millie change her mind? Curiosity overwhelmed all other emotions; she opened her eyes.

Arthur, clutching a pillow, lay on the floor beside the bed, with Millie standing over him. Old Mrs. Henderson gasped. And fainted. So she did not hear Millie telling Arthur what she thought of him. "If I hadn't come back for the empty soup plate, you would most certainly have succeeded," she concluded. "Let's hope she is too sick to understand what you tried to do. I will say nothing. But be sure you will never be left alone with her again."

As Arthur stumbled his way out of the room, she called after him that the leftovers from dinner were in a foil package on the hall table, as usual. He must not forget them, or his grandmother would be upset.

When the old lady recovered consciousness, she had no recollection of what had happened. She awaited Arthur's promised telephone call with her usual eager anticipation, but Arthur did not phone.

On Friday old Mrs. Henderson was amazed to receive a visit from her granddaughters, neither of whom had been in town for months. But her joy lasted only as long as it took them to break the terrible news that had brought them. Arthur had been found

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dead in his apartment. He had been seized with food poisoning, had collapsed in the bathroom, and must have been too weak to get to the phone to summon help.

After a few moments during which the old lady was too stunned to speak, she began to babble. God had punished her for her wickedness . . . It had all gone wrong . . . *she* was the one who was meant to be murdered. She demanded that the police be called, insisting that Arthur had not died a natural death . . . he had been poisoned! Probably with one of Millie's highly spiced Polish sausages.

Why would Millie want to do that? one of the girls asked, humoring her.

Because Arthur tried to get her fired . . . because she was jealous of him . . .

Her granddaughters exchanged glances and shook their heads sadly. Poor Gran! Obviously she had grown senile. They patted her hand and told her she read too many detective stories.

After Arthur's funeral they kissed her goodbye and went away, having arranged for her affairs to be handled by her lawyer, since the old lady was clearly incapable of managing them herself.

While Millie was seeing them to the door, old Mrs. Henderson addressed God for what she knew would be the last time until she met Him face to face. Don't You think I've been punished enough? she whispered. What I'm going to do isn't a sin, so You shouldn't mind.

Millie came back into the room, plumped up the pillows, and stroked old Mrs. Henderson's shoulder. The old lady pulled away from the caress.

"You can't fool me," she said. "I know that you killed Arthur."

"He tried to send me away," Millie replied calmly. "I had to do it."

So! She admitted it. With pounding heart old Mrs. Henderson waited for the heavy hands to close around her throat.

When nothing happened, she opened her eyes. Millie was smiling happily. "Now I have you all to myself," she said. "Don't worry. I will take good care of you, as good as I did of my mother. No reason you shouldn't live to be a hundred."

"Q"

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam: Johnson story by

LILLIAN de la TORRE

In which James (Bozzy) Boswell plays the double role of an Eighteenth Century Dr. Watson and Perry Mason—with a crucial assist from that moral philosopher, that defender of right and justice, that detector of crime and chicane, the great Cham himself, Dr. Sam: Johnson . . . This story is based on a real-life person and event, but for the purposes of fiction the author has reduced the age and size of the Duchess of Kingston, and changed her name, costume, and fate. The Duchess of Kingston was actually tried for bigamy by her Peers in April 1776; all the rest is fascinating reconstruction and creative—as well as poetic—license . . .

MILADY BIGAMY

(as told by James Boswell, Spring, 1778)

by LILLIAN de la TORRE

"I have often thought," remarked Dr. Sam: Johnson, one Spring morning in the year 1778, "that if I kept a seraglio—"

He had often thought!—Dr. Sam: Johnson, moral philosopher, defender of right and justice, *detector* of crime and chicane, had often thought of keeping a seraglio! I looked at his square bulk, clad in his old-fashioned full-skirted coat of plain mulberry broadcloth, his strong rugged countenance with his little brown scratch-wig clapped on askew above it, and suppressed a smile.

"I say, sir, if I kept a seraglio, the houris should be clad in cotton and linen, and not at all in wool and silk, for the animal fibres are nasty, but the vegetable fibres are cleanly."

"Why, sir," I replied seriously, "I too have long meditated on keeping a seraglio, and wondered whether it may not be lawful to

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a man to have plurality of wives, say one for comfort and another for shew."

"What, sir, you talk like a heathen Turk!" growled the great Cham, rounding on me. "If this cozy arrangement be permitted a man, what is to hinder the ladies from a like indulgence?—one husband, say, for support, and 'tother for sport? 'Twill be a wise father then that knows his own heir. You are a lawyer, sir, you know the problems of filiation. Would you multiply them? No, sir: bigamy is a crime, and there's an end on't!"

At this I hastily turned the topick, and of bigamy we spoke no more. Little did we then guess that a question of bigamy was soon to engage my friend's attention, in the affair of the Duchess of Kingsford—if Duchess in truth she was.

I had first beheld this lady some seven years before, when she was Miss Bellona Chamleigh, the notorious Maid of Honour. At Mrs. Cornelys's Venetian ridotto she flashed upon my sight, and took my breath away.

Rumour had not exaggerated her flawless beauty. She had a complection like strawberries and cream, a swelling rosy lip, a nose and firmset chin sculptured in marble. Even the small-pox had spared her, for the one mark it had left her touched the edge of her pouting mouth like a tiny dimple. In stature she was low, a pocket Venus, with a bosom of snow tipped with fire. A single beauty-spot shaped like a new moon adorned her perfect navel—

I go too far. Suffice it to say that for costume she wore a girdle of silken fig-leaves, and personated Eve—Eve after the fall, from the glances she was giving her gallants. One at either rosy elbow, they pressed her close, and she smiled upon them impartially. I recognised them both.

The tall, thin, swarthy, cadaverous apparition in a dark domino was Philip Piercy, Duke of Kingsford, once the handsomest Peer in the Kingdom, but now honed to an edge by a long life of dissipation. If he was no longer the handsomest, he was still the richest. Rumour had it that he was quite far gone in infatuation, and would lay those riches, with his hand and heart, at Miss Bellona's feet.

Would she accept of them? Only one obstacle intervened. That obstacle stood at her other elbow: Captain Aurelius Hart, of H.M.S. *Dangerous*, a third-rate of fifty guns, which now lay fitting at Portsmouth, leaving the gallant Captain free to press his suit.

In person, the Captain was the lady's match, not tall, but broad

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of shoulder, and justly proportioned in every limb. He had far-seeing light blue eyes in a sun-burned face, and his expression was cool, with a look of incipient mirth. The patches of Harlequin set off his muscular masculinity.

With his name too Dame Rumour had been busy. He had won the lady's heart, it was averred; but he was not likely to win her hand, being an impecunious younger son, tho' of an Earl.

So she passed on in her nakedness, giving no sign of which lover—if either—should possess her.

A black-avised young fellow garbed like the Devil watched them go. He scowled upon them with a look so lowering I looked again, and recognised him for Mr. Eadwin Maynton, Kingsford's nephew, heir-presumptive to his pelf (tho' not his Dukedom), being the son of the Duke's sister. If Bellona married his Uncle, it would cost Mr. Eadwin dear.

The audacity of the Maid of Honour at the masquerade had been too blatant. She was forthwith banished from the Court. Unrepentant, she had rusticated herself. Accompanied only by her confidential woman, one Ann Crannock, she slipped off to her Aunt Hammer's country house at Linton, near Portsmouth.

Near Portsmouth! Where lay the Captain's ship! No more was needed to inflate the tale.

"The Captain calls daily to press his suit."

"The Captain has taken her into keeping."

"There you are out, the Captain has wedded her secretly."

"You are all misled. The *Dangerous* has gone to sea —the Captain has deserted her."

"And serve her right, the hussy!"

The hussy Maid of Honour was not one to be rusticated for long. Soon she was under their noses again, on the arm of the still infatuated Duke of Kingsford. Mr. Eadwin Maynton moved Heaven and earth to forestall a marriage, but only succeeded in mortally offending his wealthy Uncle. Within a year of that scandalous masquerade, Miss Bellona Chamleigh was Duchess of Kingsford.

Appearing at Court on the occasion, she flaunted herself in white sattin encrusted with Brussels point and embroidered with a Duke's ransom in pearls. She would give the world something to talk about!

They talked with a will. They talked of Captain Hart, jilted on the Jamaica station. They talked of Mr. Eadwin Maynton, sulking at home. They were still talking several years later when the old

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Duke suddenly died—of his Duchess's obstreperous behaviour, said some with a frown, of her amorous charms, said others with a snigger.

It was at this juncture that one morning in the year '78 a crested coach drew rein in Bolt Court and a lady descended. From an upper window I looked down on her modish tall powdered head and her furbelowed polonaise of royal purple brocade.

I turned from the window with a smile. "What, sir, you have an assignation with a fine lady? Am I *de trop*?"

"You are never *de trop*, Bozzy. Pray remain, and let us see what this visitation portends."

The Duchess of Kingsford swept in without ceremony.

"Pray forgive me, Dr. Johnson, my errand is to Mr. Boswell. I was directed hither to find him—I *must* have Mr. Boswell!"

"And you *shall* have Mr. Boswell," I cried warmly, "tho' it were for wager of battle!"

"You have hit it, sir! For my honour, perhaps my life, is at stake! You shall defend me, sir, in my need—and Dr. Johnson," she added with a sudden flashing smile, "shall be our counsellor."

"If I am to counsel you, Madam, you must tell me clearly what is the matter."

"Know then, gentlemen, that in the winter last past, my dear husband the Duke of Kingsford died, and left me inconsolable—inconsolable, yet not bare, for in token of our undying devotion, he left me all that was his. In so doing, he cut off his nephew Eadwin with a few guineas, and therein lies the difficulty. For Mr. Eadwin is no friend to me. He has never spared to vilify me for a scheaming adventuress. And now he has hit upon a plan—he thinks—in one motion to disgrace me and deprive me of my inheritance. He goes about to nullify my marriage to the Duke."

"How can this be done, your Grace?"

"He has resurrected the old gossip about Captain Hart, that we were secretly married at Linton long ago. The whole town buzzes with the tale, and the comedians lampoon me on the stage as Milady Bigamy."

"What the comedians play," observed Dr. Johnson drily, "is not evidence. Gossip cannot harm you, your Grace—unless it is true."

"It is false. There was no such marriage. There might have been, it is true (looking pensive) had he not abandoned me, as Aeneas abandoned Dido, and put to sea in the *Dangerous*—leaving me, " she added frankly, "to make a better match."

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"Then where is the difficulty?"

"False testimony is the difficulty. Aunt Hammer is dead, and the clergyman is dead. But his widow is alive, and Eadwin has bought her. Worst of all, he has suborned Ann Crannock, my confidential woman that was, and she will swear to the wedding."

"Are there marriage lines?"

"Of course not. No marriage, no marriage lines."

"And the Captain? Where is he?"

"At sea. He now commands a first-rate, the *Challenger*, and wins great fame, and much prize money, against the French. I am well assured I am safe in that quarter."

"Then," said I, "this accusation of bigamy is soon answered. "But I am not accustomed to appear at the Old Bailey."

"The Old Bailey!" cried she with scorn. "Who speaks of the Old Bailey? Shall a Duchess be tried like a greasy bawd at the Old Bailey? I am the Duchess of Kingsford! I shall be tried by my Peers!"

"If you are Mrs. Aurelius Hart?"

"I am not Mrs. Aurelius Hart! But if I were—Aurelius's brothers are dead in the American war, his father the Earl is no more, and Aurelius is Earl of Westerfell. As Duchess or as Countess, I shall be tried by my Peers!"

Flushed and with flashing eyes, the ci-devant Maid of Honour looked every inch a Peeress as she uttered these words.

"'Tis for this I must have Mr. Boswell. From the gallery in the House of Lords I recently heard him plead the cause of the heir of Douglas: in such terms of melting eloquence did he defend the good name of Lady Jane Douglas, I will have no other to defend mine!"

My new role as the Duchess's champion entailed many duties that I had hardly expected. There were of course long consults with herself and her solicitor, a dry, prosy old solicitor named Pettigree. But I had not counted on attending her strolls in the park, or carrying her bandboxes from the milliner's.

"And to-morrow, Mr. Boswell, you shall squire me to the ridotto."

"The masquerade! Your Grace jests!"

"Far from it, sir. Eadwin Maynton seeks to drive me under ground, but he shall not succeed. No, sir; my heart is set on it, and to the ridotto I will go!"

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To the ridotto we went. The Duchess was regal in a domino of Roman purple over a gown of lavender lutestring, and wore a half-mask with a valance of provocative black lace to the chin. I personated a wizard, with my black gown strewn with cabbalistick symbols, and a conical hat to make me tall.

It was a ridotto *al fresco*, in the groves of Vauxhall. In the soft May evening, we listened to the band of musick in the pavilion; we took a syllabub; we walked in the allées to hear the nightingale sing. It was pleasant strolling beneath the young green of the trees by the light of a thousand lamps, watching the masquers pass: a Boadicea in armour, a Hamlet all in black, an Indian Sultana, a muscular Harlequin with a long-nosed Venetian mask, a cowled monk—

"So, Milady Bigamy!" The voice was loud and harsh. "You hide your face, as is fit; but we know you for what you are!"

Passing masquers paused to listen. Pulling the mask from her face, the Duchess whirled on the speaker. A thin swarthy countenance glowered at her under the monk's cowl.

"Eadwin Maynton!" she said quietly. "Why do you pursue me? How have I harmed you? 'Twas your own folly that alienated your kind Uncle."

" 'Twas your machinations!" He was perhaps inebriated, and intent on making a scene. More listeners arrived to enjoy it.

"I have irrefutable evidences of your double dealing," he bawled, "and when it comes to the proof, I'll un-duchess you, Milday Bigamy!"

"This fellow is drunk. Come, Mr. Boswell."

The Duchess turned away contemptuously. Mr. Eadwin seized her arm and swung her back. The next minute he was flat on the ground, and a menacing figure in Harlequin's patches stood over him.

"What is your pleasure, Madam?" asked the Harlequin calmly. "Shall he beg pardon?"

"Let him lie," said the Duchess. "He's a liar, let him lie."

"Then be off!"

Maynton made off, muttering.

"And you, ladies and gentlemen, the comedy is over."

Behind the beak-nosed mask, light eyes of ice-blue raked the gapers, and they began to melt away.

"I thank you, my friend. And now, as you say, the comedy is over," smiled the Duchess.

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"There is yet a farce to play," said the Harlequin. "*The Fatal Marriage*." He lifted his mask by its snout, and smiled at her. "Who, unless a husband, shall protect his lady wife?"

The Duchess's face stiffened.

"I do not know you."

"What, forgot so soon?" His glance laughed at her. "Such is the fate of the sailor!"

"Do not mock me, Aurelius. You know we are nothing to one another."

"Speak for yourself, Bellona."

"I will speak one word, then: Good-bye."

She reached me her hand, and I led her away. Captain Hart watched us go, his light eyes intent, and a small half-smile upon his lips.

That was the end of Milady Duchess's ridotto. What would come of it?

Nothing good, I feared. My fears were soon doubled. Returning from the river one day in the Duchess's carriage, we found ourselves passing by Mr. Eadwin Moynton's lodging. As we approached, a man issued from the door, an erect figure in nautical blue, whose ruddy countenance wore a satisfied smile. He turned away without a glance in our direction.

"Aurelius calling upon Eadwin!" cried the Duchess, staring after him. "What are they plotting against me?"

To this I had no answer.

Time was running out. The trial was looming close. In Westminster Hall, carpenters were knocking together scaffolding to prepare for the shew. At Kingston House, Dr. Johnson was quoting Livy, I was polishing my oration, and old Pettigree was digging up learned instances.

"Keep up your heart, your Grace," said the solicitor earnestly in his rusty voice, "for should the worst befall, I have instances to shew that the penalty is no longer death at the stake—"

"At the stake!" gasped the Duchess.

"No, your Grace, certainly not, not death by burning. I shall prove it, but meerly branding on the hand—"

"Branding!" shrieked the Duchess. Her white fingers clutched mine.

"No *alibi*," fretted old Pettigree, "no testimony from Linton on your behalf, Captain Hart in the adverse camp—no, no, your Grace must put your hope in me!"

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At such Job's comfort Dr. Johnson could scarce repress a smile.

"Hope rather," he suggested, "in Mr. Boswell, for if these women lie, it must be made manifest in cross-examination. I shall be on hand to note what they say, as I once noted the Parliamentary debates from the gallery; and it will go hard but we shall catch them out in their lies."

Bellona Chamleigh lifted her head in a characteristick wilful gesture.

"I trust in Mr. Boswell, and I am not afraid."

Rising early on the morning of the fateful day, I donned my voluminous black advocate's gown, and a lawyer's powdered wig that I had rented from Tibbs the perruquier for a guinea. I thought that the latter well set off my dark countenance, with its long nose and attentive look. Thus attired, I posted myself betimes outside Westminster Hall to see the procession pass.

At ten o'clock it began. First came the factotums and the functionaries, the yeoman-usher robed, heralds in tabards, serjeants-at-arms with maces in their hands. Then the Peers paced into view, walking two and two, splendid in their crimson velvet mantles and snowy capes of ermine powdered with black tail-tips. Last came the Lord High Steward, his long crimson train borne up behind him, and so they passed into Westminster Hall.

When I entered at last, in my turn as a lowly lawyer, the sight struck me with something like awe. The noble hall, with its soaring roof, was packed to the vault with persons of quality seated upon tier after tier of scaffolding. Silks rustled, laces fluttered, brocades glowed, high powdered foretops rose over all. Around three sides of the level floor gathered the Peers in their splendid robes.

All stood uncovered as the King's Commission was read aloud and the white staff of office was ceremoniously handed up to the Lord High Steward where he sat under a crimson canopy. With a sibilant rustle, the packed hall sat, and the trial began.

"Oyez, oyez, oyez! Bellona, duchess-dowager of Kingsford, come into court!"

She came in a little procession of her own, her ladies of honour, her chaplain, her physician and her apothecary attending; but every staring eye saw her only. Old Pettigree had argued in vain that deep mourning was the only wear; she would have none of it. She walked in proudly in white sattin embroidered with pearls,

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that very court-dress she had flaunted as old Kingsford's bride: "In token of my innocence," she told old Pettigree.

With a deep triple reverence she took her place on the elevated platform that served for a dock, and stood with lifted head to listen to the indictment.

"Bellona, duchess-dowager of Kingsford, you stand indicted by the name of Bellona, wife of Aurelius Hart, now Earl of Westerfell, for that you, in the eleventh year of our sovereign lord King George the Third, being then married and the wife of the said Aurelius Hart, did marry and take to husband Philip Piercy, Duke of Kingsford, feloniously and with force and arms—"

Though it was the usual legal verbiage to recite that every felony was committed "with force and arms," the picture conjured up of little Bellona, like a highwayman, clapping a pistol to the old Duke's head and marching him to the altar, was too much for the Lords. Laughter swept the benches, and the lady at the bar frankly joined in.

"How say you? Are you guilty of the felony whereof you stand indicted, or not guilty?"

Silence fell. Bellona sobered, lifted her head, and pronounced in her rich voice: "Not guilty!"

"Culprit, how will you be tried?"

"By God and my Peers."

"Oyez, oyez, oyez! All manner of persons that will give evidence on behalf of our sovereign lord the King, against Bellona, duchess-dowager of Kingsford, let them come forth, and they shall be heard, for now she stands at the bar upon her deliverance."

Thereupon Edward Thurlow, Attorney General, came forth, formidable with his bristling hairy eyebrows and his growling voice like distant thunder.

He began with an eloquent denunciation of the crime of bigamy, its malignant complection, its pernitious example, *et caetera, et caetera.* That duty performed, he drily recited the story of the alleged marriage at Linton as, he said, his witnesses would prove it.

"And now, my Lords, we will proceed to call our witnesses. Call Margery Amys."

Mrs. Amys, the clergyman's widow, was a tall stick of a woman well on in years, wearing rusty bombazine and an old-fashioned lawn cap tied under her nutcracker chin. She put a gnarled hand on the Bible the clerk held out to her.

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"Hearken to your oath. The evidence you shall give on behalf of our sovereign lord the King's majesty, against Bellona duchess-dowager of Kingsford, shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God."

The old dame mumbled something, and kissed the book. But when the questions began, she spoke up in a rusty screech, and graphically portrayed a clandestine marriage at Linton church in the year '71.

"They came by night, nigh upon midnight, to the church at Linton, and desired of the late Mr. Amys that he should join them two in matrimony."

Q. Which two?

A. Them two, Captain Hart and Miss Bellona Chamleigh.

Q. And did he so unite them?

A. He did so, and I stood by and saw it done.

Q. Who was the bride?

A. Miss Bellona Chamleigh.

Q. Say if you see her now present?

A. (pointing) That's her, her in white.

The Duchess stared her down contemptuously.

As I rose to cross-examine, I sent a glance to the upper tier, where sat Dr. Johnson. He was writing, and frowning as he wrote; but no guidance came my way. Making up with a portentous scowl for what I lacked in matter, I began:

Q. It was dark at midnight?

A. Yes, sir, mirk dark.

Q. Then, Mrs. Amys, how did you see the bride to know her again?

A. Captain Hart lighted a wax taper, and put it in his hat, and by that light they were married, and so I know her again.

Q. (probing) You know a great deal, Madam. What has Mr. Eadwin Maynton given you to appear on his behalf?

A. Nothing, sir.

Q. What has he promised you?

A. Nothing neither.

Q. Then why are you here?

A. (piously) I come for the sake of truth and justice, sir.

And on that sanctimonious note, I had to let her go.

"Call Ann Crannock!"

Ann Crannock approached in a flurry of curtseys, scattering smiles like sweetmeats. The erstwhile confidential woman was a

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plump, round, rosy little thing, of a certain age, but still pleasing, carefully got up like a stage milkmaid in snowy kerchief and pinner. She mounted the platform with a bounce, and favoured the Attorney General with a beaming smile.

The Duchess hissed something between her teeth. It sounded like "Judas!"

The clerk with his Bible hastily stepped between. Ann Crannock took the oath, smiling broadly, and Thurlow commenced his interrogation:

Q. You were the prisoner's woman?

A. Yes, sir, and I loved her like my own child.

Q. You saw her married to Captain Hart?

A. Yes, sir, the pretty dears, they could not wait for very love-sickness.

Q. That was at Linton in July of the year 1771?

A. Yes, sir, the third of July, for the Captain sailed with the Jamaica squadron on the fourth. Ah, the sweet poppets, they were loath to part!

Q. Who married them?

A. Mr. Amys, sir, the vicar of Linton. We walked to the church together, the lady's Aunt Mrs. Hammer, and I myself, and the sweet lovebirds. The clock was going towards midnight, that the servants might not know.

Q. Why must not the servants know?

A. Sir, nobody was to know, lest the Captain's father the Earl cut him off for marrying a lady without any fortune.

Q. Well, and they were married by Mr. Amys. Did he give a certificate of the marriage?

A. Yes, sir, he did, he wrote it out with his own hand, and I signed for a witness. I was happy for my lady from my heart.

Q. You say the vicar gave a certificate. (Thurlow sharply raised his voice as he whipped out a paper.) Is this it?

A. (clasping her hands and beaming with pleasure) O sir, that is it. See, there is my handwriting. Well I mind how the Captain kissed it and put it in his bosom to keep!

"'Tis false!"

The Duchess was on her feet in a rage. For a breath she stood so in her white sattin and pearls; then she sank down in a swoon. Her attendants instantly raised her and bore her out among them. I saw the little apothecary hopping like a grasshopper on the fringes, flourishing his hartshorn bottle.

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The Peers were glad enough of an excuse for a recess, and so was I. I pushed my way to the lobby in search of Dr. Johnson. I was furious. "The jade has lied to us!" I cried as I beheld him. "I'll throw up my brief!"

"You will do well to do so," murmured the Attorney General at my elbow. He still held the fatal marriage lines.

"Pray, Mr. Thurlow, give me a sight of that paper," requested Dr. Johnson.

"Dr. Johnson's wish is my command," said Thurlow with a bow: he had a particular regard for the burly philosopher.

Dr. Johnson held the paper to the light, peering so close with his near-sighted eyes that his lashes almost brushed the surface.

"Aye, sir, look close," smiled Thurlow. " 'Tis authentick, I assure you. I have particular reason to know."

"Then there's no more to be said."

Thurlow took the paper, bowed, and withdrew.

All along I had been conscious of another legal figure hovering near. Now I looked at him directly. He was hunched into a voluminous advocate's gown, and topped by one of Mr. Tibbs's largest wigs; but there was no missing those ice-blue eyes.

"Captain Hart! You here?"

"I had a mind to see the last of my widow," he said sardonically. "I see she is in good hands."

"But to come here! Will you not be recognised, and detained, and put on the stand?"

"What Peers detain a Peer? No, sir. While the House sits, I cannot be summoned: and when it rises, all is over. Bellona may be easy; I shan't peach. Adieu."

"Stay, sir—" But he was gone.

After an hour, the Duchess of Kingsford returned to the hall with her head held high, and inquiry resumed. There was not much more harm Mistress Crannock could do. She was led once more to repeat: she saw them wedded, the sweet dears, and she signed the marriage lines, and that was the very paper now in Mr. Thurlow's hand.

"You say this is the paper? That is conclusive, I think. (smiling) You may cross-examine, Mr. Boswell."

Ann Crannock smiled at me, and I smiled back, as I began:

Q. You say, Mistress Crannock, that you witnessed this marriage?

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A. Yes, sir.

Q. And then and there you signed the marriage lines?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. On July 3, 1771?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Think well, did you not set your hand to it at some subsequent date?

A. No, sir.

Q. Perhaps to oblige Mr. Eadwin Maynton?

A. No, sir, certainly not. I saw them wedded, and signed forthwith.

Q. Then I put it to you: *How did you on July 3, 1771, set your hand to a piece of paper that was not made at the manufactory until the year 1774?*

Ann Crannock turned red, then pale, opened her mouth, but no sound came. "Can you make that good, Mr. Boswell?" demanded Thurlow.

"Yes, sir, if I may call a witness, tho' out of order."

"Aye, call him—let's hear him—" the answer swept the Peers' benches. Their Lordships cared nothing for order.

"I call Dr. Samuel Johnson."

Dr. Johnson advanced and executed one of his stately obeisances.

"You must know, my Lords and gentlemen," he began, "that I have dealt with paper for half a century, and I have friends among the paper-makers. Paper, my Lords, is made by grinding up rag, and wetting it, and laying it to dry upon a grid of wires. Now he who has a mind to sign his work, twists his mark in wire and lays it in, for every wire leaves its impression, which is called a watermark. With such a mark, in the shape of an S, did my friend Sully the paper-maker sign the papers he made before the year '74.

"But in that year, my Lords, he took his son into partnership, and from thenceforth marked his paper with a double S. I took occasion this afternoon to confirm the date, 1774, from his own mouth. Now, my Lords, if you take this supposed document of 1771 (taking it in his hand) and hold it thus to the light, you may see in it the double S watermark: which, my Lords, proves this so-called conclusive evidence to be a forgery, and Ann Crannock a liar!"

The paper passed from hand to hand, and the Lords began to

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seethe.

"The Question! The Question!" was the cry. The clamour persisted, and did not cease until perforce the Lord High Steward arose, bared his head, and put the question:

"Is the prisoner guilty of the felony whereof she stands indicted, or not guilty?"

In a breathless hush, the first of the barons rose in his ermine. Bellona lifted her chin. The young nobleman put his right hand upon his heart and pronounced clearly:

"Not guilty, upon my honour!"

So said each and every Peer:

"Not guilty, upon my honour!"

My client was acquitted!

At her Grace's desire, I had provided means whereby, at the trial's end, come good fortune or ill, the Duchess might escape the press of the populace. A plain coach waited at a postern door, and thither, her white satin and pearls muffled in a capuchin, my friend and I hurried her.

Quickly she mounted the step and slipped inside. Suddenly she screamed. Inside the coach a man awaited us. Captain Aurelius Hart in his blue coat lounged there at his ease.

"Nay, sweet wife, my wife no more," he murmured softly, "do not shun me, for now that you are decreed to be another man's widow, I mean to woo you anew. I have prepared a small victory feast at my lodgings, and I hope your friends will do us the honour of partaking of it with us."

"Victory!" breathed Bellona as the coach moved us off. "How could you be so sure of victory?"

"Because," said Dr. Johnson, "he brought it about. Am I not right, sir?"

"Why, sir, as to that—"

"As to that, sir, there is no need to prevaricate. I learned this afternoon from Sully the paper-maker that a seafaring man resembling Captain Hart had been at him last week to learn about papers, and had carried away a sheet of the double S kind. It is clear that it was you, sir, who foisted upon Eadwin Maynton the forgery that, being exposed, defeated him."

All this while the coach was carrying us onward. In the shadowy interior, Captain Hart frankly grinned.

"'Twas easy, sir. Mr. Eadwin was eager, and quite without

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scruple, and why should he doubt a paper that came from the hands of the wronged husband? How could he guess that I had carefully contrived it to ruin his cause?"

"It was a bad cause," said Dr. Johnson, "and he is well paid for his lack of scruple."

"But, Captain Hart," I put in, "how could you be sure that we would detect the forgery and proclaim it?"

"To make sure, I muffled up and ventured into the lobby. I was prepared to slip a billet into Mr. Boswell's pocket; but when I saw Dr. Johnson studying the watermark, I knew that I need not interfere further."

We were at the door. Captain Hart lifted down the lady, and with his arm around her guided her up the stair. She yielded mutely, as in a daze.

In the withdrawing room a pleasing cold regale awaited us, but Dr. Johnson was in no hurry to go to table. There was still something on his mind.

"Then, sir, before we break bread, satisfy me of one more thing. How came Ann Crannock to say the handwriting was hers?"

"Because, sir," said Captain Hart with a self-satisfied look, "it was so like her own. I find I have a pretty turn for forgery."

"That I can believe, sir. But where did you find an exemplar to fashion your forgery after?"

"Why, sir, I—" The Captain darted a glance from face to face. "You are keen, sir. There could only be one document to forge after—and here it is (producing a folded paper from his pocket). Behold the true charter of my happiness!"

I regarded it thunderstruck. A little faded as to ink, a little frayed at the edges, there lay before us a marriage certificate in due form, between Miss Bellona Chamleigh, spinster, and Captain Aurelius Hart, bachelor, drawn up in the Reverend Mr. Amys's wavering hand, and attested by Sophie Hammer and Ann Crannock, July 3, 1771!

"So, Madam," growled Dr. Johnson, "you were guilty after all!"

"Oh, no, sir! 'Twas no marriage, for the Captain was recalled to his ship, and sailed for the Jamaica station, without—without—"

"Without making you in deed and in truth my own," smiled Captain Hart.

At this specimen of legal reasoning, Dr. Johnson shook his head in bafflement, the bigamous Duchess looked as innocent as possible, and Captain Hart laughed aloud.

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"'Twas an unfortunate omission," he said, "whence flow all our uneasinesses, and I shall rectify it this night, my Countess consenting. What do you say, my dear?"

For the first time the Duchess looked directly at him. In spite of herself she blushed, and the tiny pox mark beside her lip deepened in a smile.

"Why, Aurelius, since you have saved me from branding or worse, what can I say but yes?"

"Then at last," cried the Captain, embracing her, "you shall be well and truly bedded, and so farewell to the Duchess of Kingsford!"

It seemed the moment to withdraw. As we descended, we heard them laughing together.

"Never look so put about, Bozzy," murmured Dr. Johnson on the stair. "You have won your case; justice, tho' irregularly, is done; the malignancy of Eadwin Maynton has been defeated; and as to the two above—they deserve each other."

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 499th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a solid first effort showing considerable promise. . .

The author, Richard A. Moore, was thirty-one when he submitted his first story. He was born in Atlanta and raised in the small town of Stockbridge, Georgia. After graduation from the University of Georgia he served in Vietnam, and for the past five years, as a reporter, he has covered "the Byzantine world of Georgia politics . . . the earthquakes in Guatemala, Reg Murphy's kidnaping, and one unsuccessful sniper." His "primary hobby is collecting books" and he loves to "discover good writers"—he mentions Fredric Brown, Gerald Kersh, Walter de la Mare, and Thomas Burke. His "other hobby is travel, which is greatly helped" by his wife who works for an airline . . .

HARD LUCK STORY

by RICHARD A. MOORE

He was seated at the bar, one hand loosely clutching in a forgotten sort of way a watery Scotch and soda. His suit had that rumpled appearance that could be from two hours or two days of summer driving. His glance, when I took the stool beside him, indicated I wasn't so pretty myself.

Conversationalists are rare in the imitation wood-and-leather barrooms of interstate motels, when the most recent memories are of service stations, chain restaurants, and a close call near Cincinnati. But this guy was a born talker.

"Traveling on business, eh? So am I, in a way." Pausing for a moment, twisting his glass, he continued, "Traveling *from* business is more like it. Mine has gone down the tube. Zip, gone, despite everything I could do to hold it together. That's why I'm on the road."

When the bartender took my order, the guy waved a renewal at

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his glass and then forced a humorless chuckle. "Luckily there's no crime in leaving the scene of a disaster."

I waited for my drink, debating whether or not to hear out his personal version of failure. It had been a long day of many miles and I hate business-trip conversations. It's either the pushy egotism of the salesman with a brain saturated with phony confidence or it's his dark brother, the suicidal hulk that remains after the confidence is gone.

I've heard many versions of both types in my time. But there is always that chance of learning something from those who admit their failures. I guess I'm just a sucker for a hard-luck story.

I turned slightly toward him. "There's no disgrace in bankruptcy. Certainly not these days."

"It's not the failure I'm running from. It's the end result of my last frantic attempts to hold the business together."

He turned to gaze at me, and I noticed how haggard he looked. "You have no idea how easy it is to let yourself be dragged into something dangerous and despicable when all your other options are gone. If I had just let it fail naturally a year ago, everything would be all right by now. But when I thought of my wife and daughter and how they would detest the pity and hidden smugness of their friends, I just couldn't let it go without a fight."

A touch of the old fire blazed for a moment in his eyes, feeding on my sympathy. I knew he must have been a tough man in negotiations, back when he was king of the mountain.

"Who can blame you for that? The problems come with losing, not with fighting."

He paused to strip a cigar of its cellophane wrapper and accept my light. "That isn't always the case. No, sir, I found a way to make a business failure seem like a minor detail.

"I don't know how familiar you are with business these days, but a man can present all the appearances of being well-to-do one day and be broke the next. All it takes is one panicky bank calling a note, and millions in investments can collapse like a house of cards because of one hundred thousand dollars in cash.

"Oh, it's happened to better men than me. You see, this world floats on confidence. I've had a bit of luck in the past, and since then have had no trouble raising money for projects. People will invest, banks will lend more on the basis of your reputation than on a stack of projections and balance sheets.

"But you can't afford to fail. One flop and everyone gets antsy.

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It's no longer the brag of being in a deal with the guy with the touch of gold. You're only as good as your last deal."

He bellowed out a huge puff of smoke and accepted another drink from the bartender. "I stretched myself too thin. Four or five deals going at once, all begun in the time when raising money was the simplest part of an operation. A bank where I had a hundred-grand note was hurt in the foreign-money market and really roughed up by the collapse in real-estate development. They needed cash and called some notes, mine among them.

"On paper I looked great. A millionaire. But in fact I couldn't scrape together one-tenth of the note: undeveloped real estate was worthless for raising cash. You couldn't move it. What cash I did have was taken in a fight for control of a New Orleans business. The minority interest there had a brother-in-law on the bank board and in a pressure deal to get us to sell out cheap, the bank cut my line of credit—anyway, for all practical purposes, I was broke."

He combed his fingers through plastered-down black hair, while I lighted another cigarette and waited.

"Every bank in town turned me down on terms both long and short. I wasn't really worried. There's money out there if you can shake it loose. A couple deals almost came off, but one guy turned out to be nothing but talk, and another was hit with a crisis of his own that dried up his ready money. The deadline was put off several times, but the day of reckoning finally came.

"I was almost out of hope when a guy I had hit with the deal called me with an idea. I knew him fairly well and he was sympathetic. If he had the spare money, I believe he would have bailed me out himself. I offered him one-half of a six-hundred-grand proposition for one hundred upfront G's.

"He had been in a similar bind once and knew a way to get money if all else failed. He himself had not had to use it because at the last minute something else had always come through for him."

The man hesitated, then waved to the bartender for another drink. I waited until the stillness stretched into more than a minute. "Well, what was the deal?"

"He introduced me to some people. People with connections. They could get me a loan from a certain New York bank in a day's time. With their okay the bank would mysteriously grant the loan immediately. I would pay the bank the usual rates and

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pay the local connections two percent every month."

I whistled under my breath. "Two percent a month is twenty-four percent a year. On top of the bank rates you would be paying about thirty-five percent a year."

His face broke into a rueful grin. "Oh, it was robbery, no doubt about it. But like an idiot I figured to swing another deal in a month's time and get out from under this one. But I needed the time to operate, which this would give me.

"My friend warned me. He told me to take the deal if I must but never miss those monthly two percent payments. 'These boys don't fool around,' he said. And he was so right.

"The hundred G's went into the business and then I faced the new problems of coming up with the monthly payments to both the bank and under the table. It was the same thing all over again. In smaller doses for sure, but every damn month.

"I put my house into hock, my summer place, everything. Month by month it all went toward the same thing until I had nothing left. Hell, I couldn't even pay my utility bills. Finally the day came when I just didn't have it."

I let him sit staring into his drink for a minute. The noise from the jukebox swelled over us.

"They worked me over pretty good. I was never so frightened in my life. My wife, my daughter—they threatened them both. I now had two payments to raise plus the late penalty of another two percent. I couldn't do it. There just was no way."

He lapsed again into one of his pauses, beginning to show the effects of the Scotch. "What did they do?"

He smiled. "Nothing, so far. I figured if I beat it, there would be no percentage for them to mess with my family. My wife and kid know nothing about the deal. I wrote a note threatening to go to the D.A. if they bothered my family. So I figure I'm the only one in danger. And that's why I'm here. Another thousand miles and I'll find a quiet place to start all over. After the dust settles, my wife should have enough to put the kid through school, if I don't send for them first."

He drained his drink and slid off the stool, clutching the bar for support.

"Why didn't you go to the police? They would give you protection. You could put the locals behind bars and a smart D.A. might be able to trace it all the way to New York."

"I thought of that. Frankly I haven't ruled it out. Right now,

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however, I just need to get away and think it through. I don't want to do anything that might endanger the wife and kid."

He clapped a hand on my shoulder. "Thanks for listening to me and my problems. Maybe you can profit from it. I'm sure there are a dozen morals in the story somewhere."

He staggered and I caught him. "Are you going to be able to make it to your room?"

"Yeah. Just give me a hand out the door."

I helped him out of the bar and along the narrow concrete walk back to the motel and his room. His was a sad story, and I've heard plenty in my time.

I got him onto the bed and he was asleep almost immediately. I put the pistol near his left ear and it spit a quick death. With the silencer it sounded like a popped light bulb.

There would be hell to pay for this one. Hell to pay for whoever had approved the deal. Anybody could have spotted him for a bad risk.

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

NUMBER 500

This is the 500th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine—the 500th, in the 416th issue of EQMM, now in its 38th year of continuous publication. . . For months now we have been wondering which first story would come along and become the 500th first story. What kind of mystery would Number 500 prove to be? A contemporary crime or caper story? A psychological study of character and motivation? A police procedural with the newest technological devices for law enforcement and criminal detection? Perhaps a hardboiled private-eye story with a new wrinkle?

Well, as luck would have it, First Story Number 500 fooled all of us: it was a detective story that flashed our memories back to the "Golden Age"—more a whodunit-howdunit than a whydunit, with a scientific type of "locked room," a chemistry professor as the amateur investigator, a sheriff consulting a present-day Dr. Thorndyke, harking back even farther, to the pre-Golden Age era—all in all, one of the basically classic forms, including the armchair detective. Yes, the so-called old-fashioned detective story is still with us—at least, with beginners, and there is no better place for a newcomer to start than with one of the classic forms.

The author, Lynwood Sawyer, was twenty-five when he submitted his first story. He has a degree in organic chemistry from New College, Sarasota, Florida (so we didn't question any of the technical details in his story). After retiring from chemistry, Mr. Sawyer and three others founded a music promotion company and currently he is working the graveyard shift as a package sorter at United Parcel Service. And in spare time Mr. Sawyer writes—that is, when he isn't reading or fishing or winemaking. It sounds like the patchwork multi-activity background of a blossoming author, doesn't it? . . .

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THE SHREDDED ROSE

by LYNWOOD SAWYER

"Would you care for some persimmon brandy?" asked Dr. Austin Lyle, professor emeritus of organic chemistry at Medlin College, and winner of the Priestley Medal. "I distilled it myself." He took a bottle out of the cabinet in his neat kitchen and poured a glass of the amber liquid. In spite of his age and the dignity of his position, Dr. Lyle was a dapper dresser and still moved in a jaunty fashion.

Sheriff Fedder, the heavyset chief law-enforcement officer of the small midwestern town, looked uncomfortable in his chair. His uniform was wrinkled from many hours on the job. "I'm not certain, but that's probably against the law."

"You won't run me in, will you?" smiled Dr. Lyle as he sat down. "At my age misdemeanors are one of the few excitements left to me."

"If you can help me out, I'm sure I'll overlook it," answered the sheriff. He could not help being a "by-the-book" man; most people in town preferred him that way.

"Let's go over this once more," commenced Dr. Lyle. "The coroner said Professor Tate died of natural causes, only because he could find no actual cause of death. Right?"

Fedder nodded. "That's what the autopsy showed. Tate definitely was choked or suffocated to death, but there were no marks on him. No bruises, no cuts. He looked as if he had fallen asleep in the bathtub, then had trouble breathing. It wasn't a heart attack either, and none of his other organs showed any traces of damage."

"Perhaps carbon monoxide?" suggested Dr. Lyle, his normally twinkling eyes thoughtful.

"He did have an electric heater on, and the whirlpool machine was running, but there were no traces of monoxide, or cyanide either. The coroner thought Tate might have been suffocated by carbon dioxide, perhaps caused by combustion, but that theory didn't hold either."

"Would you mind repeating what you do know?" Almost in-

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stinctively Dr. Lyle traced chemical formulas on the table top with his finger.

"All right. Professor Tate was a bit of a health nut and had a whirlpool machine installed in his tub. His housekeeper said good night at eight thirty. He told her he was going to take his customary whirlpool bath." The sheriff recited the facts with a mixture of puzzlement and impatience.

"How long did his bath usually take?"

"He normally spent about an hour soaking. He used a special brand of mineral salts, imported from Germany. The coroner said this wouldn't have affected him though."

"When and how did you enter the case?" Dr. Lyle slowly sipped the brandy, making mental notes.

"The housekeeper came in at seven the next morning to prepare his breakfast. She couldn't find him and tried the bathroom door. It was locked and she could hear the whirlpool machine still running. She banged on the door, received no response, then called us. We came to the house, and when he didn't answer we broke down the bathroom door. He was still in the tub, as if he had fallen asleep." The sheriff stared around at the kitchen. He had expected the glass apparatus of a "mad scientist," but the kitchen seemed just like any ordinary kitchen, even a bit old-fashioned.

"Did you notice anything unusual about the bathroom?"

"Plants everywhere—on the sink, on the window sill, on a set of shelves. Perhaps one of them bloomed and released a lethal gas. There was a sort of shredded rose on the floor, and a vase split in half on top of it. Several other roses were lying loose on the window sill, with tags on them."

"He was a professor of botany," observed Dr. Lyle. "A bathroom makes a convenient greenhouse."

"The only window was closed."

"Could anyone get through it?"

Sheriff Fedder shook his head. "Because it was on the ground floor, there was a thick strong grille outside the window. We checked it carefully, and the bolts hadn't been disturbed."

"But could the window be fully opened through the grille?"

The sheriff shook his head.

"Had he eaten anything unusual the night before?" asked Dr. Lyle.

"According to his housekeeper, a normal fish dinner and some vegetables. That's why I came to you. Perhaps you might know of

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some exotic poison, a slow-acting one which could do its trick and then disappear without leaving a trace."

Dr. Lyle tilted his head owlishly. "How much television do you watch?" he asked.

"An average amount," admitted Fedder reluctantly.

"Never mind. But I seriously doubt if that's how he was murdered."

"The coroner didn't find any exotic chemicals in his blood," admitted the sheriff. He was accustomed to dealing with college pranks, or an occasional speeder. Murder was even more of a shock to him than to many of the professors who had grown cynical about human nature.

Dr. Lyle pursed his lips, a habit acquired during 40 years of academics. "Tell me, was the dust on the floor in little circles, almost like dust which has been struck by rainwater?"

"How did you know that?" asked Fedder. "It was water condensing from the ceiling, right?" he asked, pleased at his deduction.

"Wrong," said Dr. Lyle. Then changing the subject he said, "Tell me, do you have any suspects?"

"His housekeeper, of course, and a distant cousin who is his only living relative and stands to inherit. And we know that the new physical chemistry professor, Andrews, has a grudge against him." The sheriff counted off the suspects on three fingers, obviously pleased there were so few.

"Professor Tate ridiculed Andrews' latest monograph in public, didn't he? And Tate was the only member of the tenure committee who voted against granting Andrews tenure, wasn't he?"

"Yes, and that's the only evidence we have that Andrews had motive to murder Professor Tate," replied the sheriff.

"Arrest him then, before he chokes to death on his gloating." Dr. Lyle's face beamed, his voice adding a Q.E.D. of inflection.

"Now hold on, Dr. Lyle! We have motive, but Andrews didn't leave any clues at all."

"On the contrary," said Dr. Lyle. "Andrews left so many clues that the murder could have borne his signature. The method by which he killed Professor Tate was so ingenious that he probably deserved tenure. A mind that clever will atrophy in prison, but of course he must be punished."

"I don't get it," said Fedder.

"He did it by *atmosphere,*" replied Dr. Lyle, "a fact anyone taking Chemistry 101 would know instantly."

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"I see," said the sheriff, nodding to himself in such a fashion that Dr. Lyle knew the sheriff was doubting his mental faculties.

"No, you don't," Dr. Lyle snapped. "You haven't taken the course, have you? I suggest you enroll next semester. Everyone—especially law-enforcement officers—should take Chemistry 101, and 102, and 103, and so on."

"I'll consider it," the sheriff replied appeasingly. "But you still haven't explained how he did it."

"Last night, while Professor Tate took his whirlpool bath, Andrews came up to the window. He opened the window sash, just slightly, through the grille. In the process he knocked the rose to the floor. Then he poured a large quantity, perhaps several liters, of liquid nitrogen through the open crack in the window. It's readily available in the lab, and you can carry it around in a bottle called a Dewar flask. The container is about the size of a picnic Thermos bottle."

"What did you mean by atmosphere?"

"Nitrogen is seventy-five point five percent of the earth's atmosphere," explained Dr. Lyle. "Of course it would leave no trace in an autopsy, unlike carbon monoxide or dioxide or cyanide. It's tasteless, odorless, but unfortunately it cannot support life. The liquid nitrogen evaporated into a gas which then asphyxiated Dr. Tate. When you opened the door, you created air currents that dissipated it, and you couldn't smell it. The opening of the door mixed the nitrogen with enough air to render it harmless, so you wouldn't have been affected. *Your very entrance dispersed the murder weapon.*"

"And the dust on the floor?"

"When liquid nitrogen falls to the floor it forms droplets. As these droplets roll around, they create a static charge on their surface. The charge then picks up dust particles, the way a comb picks up bits of tissue paper after you rub the comb on fur. When the nitrogen evaporates, the dust remains in the spot where the droplet had been."

"Amazing," exclaimed the sheriff, "but you still haven't explained the rose."

"Actually, that was Andrews' big mistake. When you dip a flower into liquid nitrogen, it freezes solid, like a very thin sheet of ice. Strike it against something and it doesn't bend: it shatters like glass. Apparently the rose fell to the floor first and was frozen solid at a temperature of minus one hundred and ninety-five

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degrees centigrade. Then he accidentally knocked the vase on it, and the vase split in two. The rose was not shredded: it was shattered."

"You professors are something else," said Fedder. "I'm going to arrest Andrews at once."

He rose to leave, but Dr. Lyle grabbed his wrist. "No hurry. He thinks he's safe. Why not arrest him after you drink a glass of this excellent persimmon brandy?"

"You know, Professor," said the sheriff, sitting down, "I think that's an excellent idea."

DETECTIVERSE

CONVERSATION

by MAE Z. SCANLAN

Said Watson to Principal Dotson,
"What kind of school have you got, son?"
Dotson replied
With a measure of pride,
"Why, it's elementary, my dear Watson."

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

Robert Cittadino's first story, "Pride in One's Accomplishments," appeared in the April 1977 issue of EQMM. His second story is a terse, tough tale of a hired gunman . . .

MESSAGE FROM A DEAD MAN

by ROBERT CITTADINO

"Forster."

The sound of his name being softly spoken abruptly stirred Forster out of his fitful sleep and he sat upright in his bed, trying to gather his senses. As his eyes sought to accustom themselves to the dark, the hotel room lights were suddenly switched on and his vision was momentarily blinded by the brilliant glare of the lamp suspended from the center of the ceiling. Slowly, as his vision cleared, he could make out the figure of a somberly dressed man, average in build, standing at the foot of the bed.

Forster blinked his eyes into sharper focus and saw that the intruder was holding a heavy-caliber automatic, its barrel abnormally lengthened by a silencer.

"It's finally happened," Forster said bitterly. "The chase has finally ended. Who would have thought it would end this way—in a rundown, stinking hotel in Barcelona."

The other man replied calmly, "It was only a matter of time. I have to admit it was a good hunt—Canada, Mexico, Central America, South Africa, Morocco, and now here. Nine months have elapsed since Mr. Collins hired me to track you down. It was a difficult task and there were moments when I feared I had lost your trail."

As the gunman was speaking, Forster slowly inched his hand behind his back toward his pillow. Underneath the pillow he had hidden a loaded revolver and he desperately hoped that while the other man was talking he could grab his pistol and get off a shot before the killer fired at him.

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"I have already removed the revolver, Mr. Forster," the gunman said in a bored voice. "Let's not resort to cheap theatrics, shall we?"

Forster froze, his hand barely an inch from the pillow. "I'm a light sleeper," he said in awe. "If you could come into my room and take my gun out from under my pillow, you really must be good. Who are you? I think I should at least know the name of the man who is going to kill me."

The killer nodded. "My name is Dexter. I am considered to be one of the top men in my profession and I get the highest fees for my services. Mr. Collins must be very worried about you to be willing to pay that kind of money."

Forster smiled ruefully. "That's the funny part about all this. Collins has nothing to fear from me. I left the Organization because I was sick of it and I never had any plans to go to the police. Collins wouldn't buy that, so I had no choice but to run."

"Be that as it may, Mr. Forster," Dexter said politely, "I still have to carry out my assignment. Time has run out for you."

Heavy drops of perspiration rolled down Forster's face as he realized that his last few seconds of life were slipping away. An imploring look came over his face and he suddenly pleaded, "Look, is there any way I can get out of this? I'll give you anything you want. I have the money."

Dexter shook his head and said quietly, "I'm sorry, but I've been hired to do a job. It would be unprofessional of me if I failed to complete my assignment."

"All right then," Forster said resignedly. "Do one thing for me after you kill me. In the middle drawer of the desk behind you there is an envelope. I want you to open it, read the contents, then deliver it to Collins. Will you do that for me?"

"I'll do that, Mr. Forster," Dexter replied. Then, without warning, he squeezed the trigger of the gun once, the automatic coughed, and almost as if by magic a large hole appeared in the middle of Forster's forehead. The force of the bullet threw him on his back and he lay spreadeagled on the bed, face up.

Dexter dropped the gun on the bed, took out a small pocket camera with flash attachment, and snapped a series of close-up photographs of Forster's head. These were necessary because Collins, like former clients, wanted conclusive proof that the hit had been made. Dexter finished taking his grisly pictures and placed the camera back in his pocket.

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He was about to leave the room when he remembered Forster's request. Crossing over to the desk, he took out the envelope, opened it, and removed a short note typed on a plain piece of paper. After reading the message, he folded the paper and placed it back in the envelope. Taking one last glance around the room, Dexter walked over to the door, opened it, looked out, then left.

Collins was an impatient man and when Dexter finally arrived by private jet from Spain, he sprang from his desk to greet the hired killer. As he took Dexter's hand and vigorously shook it, he said, "So at last you're back. You've done an excellent job. As long as that man was alive, he was a thorn in my side but now, thanks to you, I can breathe easy. Now, I want to see those pictures you took."

Without a word Dexter took out the photographs of Forster's corpse and handed them over to Collins who snatched them up and stared at the pictures until a look of satisfaction spread over his face. Then he turned to the silent killer and said, "Your full fee has been deposited in your numbered bank account in Switzerland. You have my deepest gratitude for solving my little problem. I just want to ask you one more thing before you leave. Tell me, how did he take it when you trapped him? Did he cry and beg for mercy? I bet the coward did."

Dexter, his face devoid of expression, replied, "No, on the contrary, he took it pretty well. He faced death better then most men I have known in similar situations."

Displeased at Dexter's answer, Collins said brusquely, "Well, I'm sure you must be tired after your long trip and want to get some rest. I won't keep you any longer."

Dexter smiled a wintry smile and said, "Before I go, I have to give you this envelope. It's from Forster and there is a note inside he wanted you to read."

Puzzled, Collins seized the envelope, tore it open, and pulled out the letter. The note, neatly typewritten, read: "I knew you would hire the best man money could buy to track me down. Well, turnabout is fair play. If the man has handed you this letter, it means he has taken out the $20,000 in bills I had inside and has agreed to kill you. So long, Collins."

The letter fell out of Collins' hand and fluttered downward like a wounded bird. But before it could touch the floor, a slug had already burrowed deep into Collins' heart.

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a NEW Inspector Wexford novelet by

RUTH RENDELL

Chief Inspector Reginald Wexford and his wife Dora were on vacation in Yugoslavia. But it proved to be a "busman's holiday." As his wife expressed it, Wexford "can't leave his job at home for just two weeks," even on their first foreign holiday in ten years. Once a detective, always a detective, and when a mystery cast its shadow, the Chief Inspector couldn't resist throwing light on the darkness. It might be the slogan of all detectives, amateur and official: "Let there be light" . . .

INSPECTOR WEXFORD ON HOLIDAY

by RUTH RENDELL

The walls of the city afforded on one side a view of the blue Adriatic, on the other, massed roofs, tiled in weathered terra cotta, and cataracts of stone streets descending to the cathedral and the *Stradun Placa*. It was very hot on the walls, the sun hard and the air dry and clear. Among the red-brown roofs and the complexities of ramparts and stairs, different colors shimmered, the purple of the bougainvillea, the sky blue of the plumbago, and the flame flash of the orange trumpet flower.

"Lovely," said Dora Wexford. "Breathtaking. Aren't you glad now I made you come up here?"

"It's all right for you dark-skinned people," grumbled her husband. "My nose is beginning to feel like a fried egg."

"We'll go down at the next lot of steps and you can administer some more sun cream over a glass of beer."

It was noon, the date Saturday, June 18th. The full heat of the day had kept the Yugolsavs, but not the tourists, off the walls.

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Germans went by with cameras or stood, murmuring, *Wunderschön!*" Vivacious Italians chattered, unaffected by the midsummer sun. But some of the snatches of talk which reached Wexford were in languages not only incomprehensible but unidentifiable. It was a surprise to hear English spoken.

"Don't keep on about it, Iris!"

At first they couldn't see the speaker. But now, as they came out of the narrow defile and emerged onto one of the broad jutting courts made by a buttress top, they came face to face with the Englishman. A tall fair young man, he was standing in the farthest angle of the court, and with him was a dark-haired girl. Her back was to the Wexfords. She was staring out to sea. From her clothes, she looked as if she would have been more at home in the South of France than on the walls of Dubrovnik.

She wore a jade-green halter top that left her deeply tanned midriff bare, and a calf-length silk skirt in green and blue with parabolas on it of flamingo pink. Her sandals were pink, the strings criss-crossed up her legs, the wedge heels high. But perhaps the most striking thing about her was her hair. Raven-black and very short, it was cut at the nape in three sharp V's.

She must have replied to her companion, though Wexford hadn't heard her words. But now, without turning round, she stamped her foot, and the man said, "How can you go to the bloody place, Iris, when we can't find anyone to take us? There's nowhere to land. I wish to God you'd give it a rest."

Dora took her husband's arm, hastening him along. He could read her thoughts, not to eavesdrop on someone else's quarrel.

"You're so nosy, darling," she said when they had reached the steps and were out of earshot. "I suppose it's what comes of being a policeman."

Wexford laughed. "I'm glad you realize that's the reason. Any other man's wife would have accused him of looking at that girl."

"She was beautiful, wasn't she?" said Dora wistfully, conscious of her age. "Of course we couldn't see her face, but you could tell she had a perfect figure."

"Except for the legs. Pity she hasn't got the sense to wear trousers."

"Oh, Reg, what was wrong with her legs? And she was so beautifully tanned. When I see a girl like that it makes me feel such an old has-been."

"Don't be so daft," said Wexford crossly. "You look fine." He

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meant it. He was proud of his handsome wife, so young-looking for her late-fifties, elegant and decorous in navy skirt and crisp white blouse, her skin already golden after only two days of holiday. "And I'll tell you one thing," he added. "You'd beat her hollow in any ankle competition."

Dora smiled at him, comforted. They sat down at a table in a pavement café where the shade was deep and a cool breeze blew. Just time for a beer and an orange juice, and then to catch the water taxi back down the coast to Mirna.

In Serbo-Croat *mirna* means peaceful. And so Chief Inspector Wexford found the resort after a grueling winter and spring in Kingsmarkham, after petty crime and serious crime, and finally a squalid murder case which had been solved, not by him in spite of his work and research, but by a young expert from Scotland Yard. It was Inspector Burden, his friend and assistant, who had advised him to get right away for his holiday. Not Wales or Cornwall this time, but the Dalmatian Coast of Yugoslavia where he, Burden, had taken his children the previous year.

"Mirna," said Burden. "There are three good hotels, but the village is quite unspoilt. You can go everywhere by water. There are two or three old chaps who run taxi boats. It never rained once while we were there. And you're into all this nature stuff, this ecology. The marine life's amazing, and so are the flowers and butterflies."

It was the marine life with which Wexford was getting acquainted two mornings after the trip to Dubrovnik. He had left Dora prone on an air bed by the hotel swimming pool, knowing full well that sunbathing was impossible for his Anglo-Saxon skin. Already his nose was peeling. So he had anointed his face, put on a long-sleeved shirt, and walked round the wooded point to Mirna harbor.

The little port had a harbor wall built of the same stone as the city of Dubrovnik, and kneeling down to peer over, he saw that beneath the water line the rocks and the masonry were thickly covered with a tapestry of sea anemones and tiny shells and flowering weed and starfishes. The water was perfectly clear and unpolluted. He could clearly see the bottom, 15 feet down, and now a shoal of silvery-brown fish glided out from a sea-bed bush.

Fascinated, Wexford leaned over, understanding why so many swimmers out there were equipped with goggles and snorkels. A

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scarlet fish darted out from a rock, then a broad silver one, banded with black.

Behind him, a voice said, "You like it?"

Wexford got up onto his haunches. The man who had spoken was older than he, skinny and wrinkled and tough-looking. He had a walnut face, a dry smile, and surprisingly good teeth. He wore a sailor's cap and a blue-and-white-striped T-shirt, and Wexford recognized him as one of the taxi boatmen.

He replied slowly and carefully. "I like it very much. It is pretty, beautiful."

"The shores of your country were like this once. But in the nineteenth century a man called Gosse, a marine biologist, wrote a book about them and within a few years collectors had come and divested the rocks of everything."

Wexford couldn't help laughing. "Good God," he said. "I beg your pardon, but I thought—"

"That an old boatman can only say 'please' and 'zank you' and 'ten dinara'?"

"Something like that." Wexford got up to stand inches taller than the other man. "You speak remarkable English."

A broad smile. "No, it is too pedantic. I have only once been to England and that many years ago." He put out his hand. "How do you do, *Gospodine?* Ivo Racic at your service."

"Reginald Wexford."

The hand was iron-hard but the grip gentle. Racic said, "I do not wish to intrude. I spoke to you because it is rare to find a tourist interested in nature. With most it is only the sunbathing and the food and drink, eh? Or to catch the fish and take the shells."

"Come and have a drink," said Wexford. "Or are you working?"

"Josip and Mirko and I, we have a little syndicate, and they will not mind if I have a half an hour off. But I buy the drinks, eh? This is my country and you are the guest."

They walked toward the avenue of stout palm trees. "I was born here in Mirna," said Racic. "At eighteen I left for the university and when I retired and came back here after forty years and more, those palm trees were just the same, no bigger, no different. Nothing was changed till they built the hotels."

"What did you do in those forty years? Not run a boat service?"

"I was professor of Anglo-Saxon Studies at the University of Beograd, *Gospodin* Wexford."

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"Ah," said Wexford. "All is made plain. And when you retired you took up with Josip and Mirko to run the water taxis. Perhaps they were childhood friends?"

"They were. I see you have perspicacity. And may I inquire in return what is your occupation?"

Wexford said what he always said on holiday. "I'm a civil servant."

Racic grinned. "Here in Yugoslavia we are all civil servants. But let us go for our drinks. *Hajdemo, drug!*"

They chose a cluster of tables set under a vine-covered canopy, through which the sun made a gentle dappling on cobbles. Racic drank *slivovic*. The fiery brandy with its hinted undertaste of plums was forbidden to Wexford who had to watch his blood pressure. He even felt guilty when the white wine called *Posip* which Racic ordered for him arrived in a tumbler filled to the brim.

"You live here in Mirna?"

"Here alone in my *kucica* that was once my father's house. My wife died in Beograd. But it is a good and pleasant life. I have my pension and my boat and the grapes I grow and the figs, and sometimes a guest like yourself, *Gospodin* Wexford, on whom to practise my English."

Wexford would have liked to question him about the political regime, but he felt that this might be unwise and perhaps discourteous. So instead he remarked on the stately appearance of a woman in national costume, white coif, heavily embroidered, stiff black dress, who had emerged with full basket from the grocer's shop. Racic nodded, then pointed a brown thumb to a table outside the shadow of the vines.

"That is better, I think. Healthier, eh, and freer?"

She was sitting in the full sun, a young woman with short black hair, geometrically cut, who wore only a pair of white shorts and a jade-green halter top. A man came out of the currency-exchange bureau, she got up to meet him, and Wexford recognized them as the couple he had seen on the walls of Dubrovnik. They went off hand in hand and got into a white Lancia parked under the palms.

"Last time I saw them they were quarreling."

"They are staying at the Hotel Bosnia," said Racic. "On Sunday evening they drove here from Dubrovnik and they are going to remain for a week. Her name I cannot tell you, but his is Philip."

Wexford's eyebrows went up. "May I ask how you come to be

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such a mine of information, Mr. Racic?"

"They came out in my boat this morning." Racic's dark bright eyes twinkled. "Just the two of them, to be ferried across to Vrt and back. But let me tell you a little story. Once, about a year ago, a young English couple hired my boat. They were, I think, on their wedding journey—their honeymoon as you say—and it was evident they were much in love. They had no eyes but for each other and certainly no inclination to speak to the boatman.

"We were coming into shore here, perhaps a hundred meters out, when the young husband began telling his wife how much he loved her and how he could not wait to get back to the hotel to make love to her. Oh, very frank and explicit he was—and why not with only the old Yugoslav there who speaks nothing but his own outlandish tongue?

"I said nothing, I betrayed nothing in my face. We pulled in, he paid me his twenty dinars, and they walked off up the quay. Then I saw the young lady had left her bag behind and I called to her. She came back, took it, and thanked me. *Gospodin* Wexford, I could not resist it. 'You have a charming husband, madame,' I said, 'but no more than you deserve.' Oh, how she blushed, but I think she was not displeased, though they never came in my boat again."

Laughing, Wexford said, "It was hardly a similar conversation you overheard between Philip and his wife, though?"

"No." Racic looked thoughtful. "I think I will not tell you what I overheard. It is no business of ours. And now I must make my excuses, but we shall meet again."

"In your boat, certainly. I must take my wife over to Vrt for the bathing."

"Better than that," said Racic. "Bring your wife and I will take you for a trip round the islands. On Wednesday? No, I am not touting for custom. This will be a trip—now for a good colloquial expression—on the house! You and me and *Gospoda* Wexford."

"Those very nice Germans," said Dora, "have asked us to go with them in their car to Cetinje on Wednesday."

"Mm," said Wexford absently. "Good idea." It was nine o'clock but very dark beyond the range of the waterside lights. They had walked into Mirna after dinner, it being too late for the taxi boats, and were having coffee on the terrace of a restaurant at the harbor's edge. The nearly tideless Adriatic lapped the stones at

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their feet with soft gulping sounds.

Suddenly he remembered. "Oh, God, I can't. I promised that Yugoslav I told you about to go on a trip round the islands with him. It would look discourteous to let him down. But you go to Cetinje."

"Well, I should like to. I may never get another chance to see Montenegro. Oh, look, darling, there are those people we saw in Dubrovnik."

For the first time Wexford saw the girl full face. Her haircut from the front was as spectacular as from the back, a fringe having been cut into a sharp peak in the center of her forehead. It looked less like hair, he thought, than a black cap painted on. In spite of the hour she wore large tinted glasses. Her colored skirt was the same one she had been wearing that first time.

She and her companion had come onto the terrace from the harbor walk. They walked slowly, she somehow reluctantly, the man called Philip looking about him as if for friends they had arranged to meet here. It couldn't have been for a vacant table, for the terrace was half empty. Dora kicked her husband's foot under the table, a warning against overt curiosity, and started to talk about her German friends, Werner and Trudi. Out of the corner of his eye Wexford saw the man and the girl hesitate, then sit down at a neighboring table. He made some sort of reply to Dora, conscious that it was he now who was being stared at.

A voice he had heard once before said, "Excuse me, we don't seem to have an ashtray. Would you mind if we used yours?"

Dora handed it to him. "Please do." She hardly looked up.

The man insisted, smiling, "You're sure you won't need it?"

"Quite sure. We don't smoke."

He wasn't the kind to give up easily, thought Wexford, and now, very intrigued by something he had noticed, he didn't want him to. Another prod from Dora's foot merely made him withdraw his own under his chair. He turned toward the other table, and to the next question, "Are you staying long in Mirna?" he replied pleasantly, "A fortnight. We've been here four days."

The effect of this simple rejoinder was startling. The man couldn't have expressed more satisfaction—and, yes, relief—if Wexford had announced to him that he had inherited a fortune or that his nearest and dearest, presumed dead, was safe.

"Oh, fantastic! It's such a change to meet some English people. We must try and get together. This is my wife. We're called

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Philip and Iris Nyman. Are you Londoners too?"

Wexford introduced himself and Dora and said they came from Kingsmarkham in Sussex. It was lovely to meet them, said Philip Nyman. They must let him buy them a drink. More coffee, then? At last Wexford accepted a cup of coffee, wondering what was so upsetting Iris Nyman that she had responded to the introductions only with a nod and now seemed almost paralyzed. Her husband's extrovert behavior? Certainly his effusive manner would have embarrassed all but the most insensitive.

As soon as they had settled the question of the drinks, Philip launched into a long account of their trip from England, how they had come down through France and Italy, the people they had met, the weather, their delight in their first sight of the Dalmatian Coast which they had never previously visited. Iris Nyman showed no delight. She simply stared out to sea, gulping down *slivovic* as if it were lemonade.

"We absolutely adored it. They say it's the least spoilt of the Mediterranean resorts, and that I can believe. We all loved Dubrovnik. That is, I mean, we brought a cousin of my wife's along with us. She was going on to holiday with some people she knows in Greece, so she flew to Athens from Dubrovnik on Sunday and left us to come on here."

Dora said, "We saw you in Dubrovnik. On the walls."

Iris Nyman's glass made a little clinking sound against her teeth. Her husband said, "You saw us on the walls? D'you know, I think I remember that." He seemed, Wexford fancied, just slightly taken aback. But not deterred. "In fact, I seem to remember we were having a bit of a row at the time."

Dora made a deprecating movement with her hands. "We just walked past you. It was so terribly hot, wasn't it?"

"You're being very charmingly discreet, Mrs. Wexford—or may I call you Dora? The point was, Dora, my wife wanted to climb one of the local mountains and I was telling her just how impractical this was. I mean, in that heat, and for what? To get the same view you get from the walls."

"So you managed to dissuade her?" Wexford said quietly.

"Indeed I did, but you rather came along at the height of the ding-dong. Another drink, darling? And how about you, Dora? Won't you change your mind?"

"I'll have a *slivovic,*" said Iris Nyman abruptly, without waiting for Dora's reply.

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It came, and it was repressively stiff. "Thank you so much, but we must go."

Eagerly, "Let me guess. You're staying at the Adriatic?" She was obliged to nod. "We're at the Bosnia. Wait a minute, how about making a date for, say, Wednesday? We could all have a trip somewhere in my car."

The Wexfords, having previous engagements, were able to refuse with clear consciences. They said good night, Wexford nodding noncommittally at Nyman's insistence that they must meet again, mustn't lose touch after having been so lucky as to encounter each other.

"Well!" said Dora when they were out of earshot. "What an insufferably rude woman."

"Just very nervous, I think," said Wexford thoughtfully. He gave her his arm and they began the walk back along the waterside path. It was very dark, the sea inky and calm, the islands invisible. "When you come to think of it, that was all very odd."

"Was it? She was rude and he was effusive to the point of impertinence, if you call that odd. He forced himself on us, got us to tell him our names—you could see she just didn't want to know. I was amazed when he called me Dora."

"That part wasn't so odd. After all, that's how one does make holiday acquaintances. Presumably, it was much the same with your Werner and Trudi."

"No, it wasn't, Reg, not at all. For one thing, we're much of an age and we're staying at the same hotel. Trudi speaks quite good English, and we were watching the children in the wading pool and she happened to mention her grandsons who are just the same age as ours, and that started it. You must see that's quite different from a man of thirty suddenly latching onto a couple old enough to be his parents in a café. I call it pushy."

Her husband reacted impatiently. "That's as may be. Perhaps you didn't notice there was a perfectly clean ashtray in the middle of that table before they sat down at it."

"*What?*" Dora halted, staring at him in the dark.

"There was. He must have put it in his pocket to give him an excuse for speaking to us. Now *that* was odd. And giving us all that gratuitous information was odd. And telling a deliberate lie was very odd indeed. Come along, my dear. Don't stand there gawping at me."

"What do you mean, he told a deliberate lie?"

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"When you told him we'd seen them on the walls, he said he remembered it and we must have overheard the quarrel between him and his wife. Now that was odd in itself. Why mention it at all? Why should we care about his domestic—or maybe I should say, mural—rows? He said the quarrel had been over climbing a mountain. But no one climbs the mountains here in summer. Besides, I remember precisely what he did say up on the walls. He said, 'We can't find anyone to take us.' Okay, so he might have meant they couldn't get a guide. But 'There's nowhere to land'? That's what he said, no doubt about it. You don't land on mountains, Dora, unless you assault them by helicopter."

"I wonder why, though? I wonder what he's up to?"

"So do I," said Wexford, "but I'm pretty sure it's not stealing ashtrays from restaurants."

They rounded the point and came within sight of the lights of the Hotel Adriatic. A little farther and they could see each other's faces. Dora saw his and read there much to disquiet her.

"You're not going to start detecting, Reg!"

"Can't help it, it's in my bones. But I won't let it interfere with your holiday, that's a promise."

On Tuesday morning Racic's taxi boat was waiting at the landing stage outside the hotel.

"*Gospoda* Wexford, it is a great pleasure to meet you!"

Courteously he handed Dora into the boat. Its awning of green canvas, now furled, gave it something the look of a gondola. As the engine started, Dora made her excuses for the following day.

"You will like Cetinje," said Racic. "Have a good time. *Gospodin* Wexford and I will have a bachelor day out. All boys together, eh? Are you quite comfortable? A little more suitable than that one for a lady, I hope."

He pointed across the bay to where a man was paddling a yellow and blue inflatable dinghy. The girl with him wore a very brief bikini. The Nymans.

"If you could manage to avoid passing those people, Mr. Racic," said Dora, "that would make me very comfortable indeed."

Racic glanced at Wexford. "You have met them? They have annoyed you?"

"Not that. They spoke to us last night in Mirna and the man was rather pushing."

"I will keep close to the shore and cross to Vrt from the small peninsula there," said Racic.

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For most of the morning there was no one else on the little shingly beach of Vrt which Racic had told them meant a garden. The huddle of cottages behind was overhung with the blue trumpet flowers of the morning glory, and among the walls rose the slender spires of cypress trees. Wexford sat in the shade, reading, while Dora sunbathed. The dinghy came close only once, but the Wexfords went unrecognized, perhaps because they were in swimming costumes. Iris Nyman stood up briefly before jumping with an explosive splash into the deep water.

"Rude she may be," said Dora, "but I'll grant she's got a lovely figure. And you were wrong about her legs, Reg. Her legs are perfect."

"Didn't notice," said Wexford.

Josip took them back. He was a thin, smiling brown man not unlike Racic, but he had no English beyond 'thank you' and 'goodbye.' The Wexfords hired him again in the afternoon to take them to Mirna, and they spent a quiet pleasant evening drinking coffee with Werner and Trudi Müller on the Germans' balcony.

Wednesday came in with a storm at sunrise, and Wexford, watching the lightning and the choppy sea, wondered if Burden had been over-optimistic with his guarantee of fine weather. But by nine the sun was out and the sky clear. He saw Dora off in the Müllers' Mercedes, then walked down to the landing stage. Racic's boat glided in.

"I have brought bread and sausage for our lunch, and *Posip* in a flask to keep it cool."

"Then we must eat it for our elevenses because I'm taking you out to lunch."

This they ate in Dubrovnik after Racic had taken him to the island of Lokrum, and Wexford listened with deepening interest to the boatman-professor's tales: how the ease and wealth of the city merchants had led to a literary renascence, how Dubrovnik-built ships had taken part in the Spanish Armada, how an earthquake had devastated the city and almost destroyed the state. They set off again for Lopud, Sipan, and Kolocep, returning across the broad calm waters as the sun began to dip down toward the sea.

"Does that little island have a name?" Wexford asked.

"It is called Vrapci, which is to say 'Sparrows.' There are thousands of sparrows, so they say, and only sparrows, for no one goes there. One cannot land a boat."

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"I see. You mean you can't get off a boat because the rocks are too sheer? What about on the other side?"

"I will pull in close and you shall see. There is a beach but no one would wish to use it. Wait."

The island was very small, perhaps no more than half a mile in circumference, and totally overgrown with stunted pines. At their roots the gray rock fell sheer to the water from a height of about ten feet. Racic brought the boat about and they came to the Adriatic side of Vrapci. No sparrows were to be seen, no life of any kind, only, between ramparts of rock, a small and forbidding beach of shingle over which an overhanging pine cast deep shade.

Looking up toward the sky and then down again at this dark stony cove, Wexford could see that, no matter what its altitude, the sun could never penetrate to this beach. Where the shingle narrowed, at the apex, was a cleft in the rock, a cave just wide enough to allow the passage of a man's body.

"Not very attractive," he said. "Why would people want to come here?"

"They do not, as far as I know. Except, perhaps—well, there is a new fashion, *Gospodin* Wexford, or *Mister,* as I should call you."

"Call me Reg."

Racic inclined his head. "Reg, yes, thank you. I like the name, though I have not previously encountered it. There is a fashion, as I mentioned, for nude bathing. Here in Yugoslavia we do not allow it, for it is not proper, not decorous. You have seen, no doubt, painted on some of the rocks, the words—in, I fear, lamentable English—'No Nudist.' But there are some who would defy this rule, especially on the small islands. Vrapci, I suppose, might take their fancy, if they could find a boat and a boatman to bring them."

"A boat could land on the beach, and its occupants swim off the rocks on the other side in the sun."

"If they were good swimmers. But we will not try it, Reg, not at our age being inclined to strip ourselves naked and risk our necks, eh?"

Once more they were off again across the wide sea. Wexford looked back to the city walls, those man-made defensive cliffs, and brought himself hesitantly to ask, "Would you tell me what you overheard of the conversation between that English couple, Philip and Iris Nyman, when you took them in your boat?"

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"So that is their name? Nyman?"

He was stalling.

"I have a good reason for asking."

"May I know it?"

Wexford sighed. "I'm a policeman."

Racic's face went very still and tight. "I do not much like that. You were sent here to watch these people? You should have told me before."

"No, Ivo, no." Wexford brought out the unfamiliar name a little self-consciously. "No, you've got me wrong. I never saw or heard of them till last Saturday. But now that I've seen them and spoken to them I believe they're doing something illegal. If that is so, it's my duty to do something about it. They're my countrymen."

"Reg," said Racic more gently, "what I overheard can have nothing to do with this matter of an illegality. It was private."

"You won't tell me?"

"No. We are not old housewives, I think, to spend our time in gossip over the garden walls of our *kucice,* eh?"

Wexford grinned. "Then will you *do* something for me? Will you contrive to let these people know—subtly, of course—that you understand the English language?"

"You are sure that what they are doing is against the law?"

"I am sure. It is drugs or some kind of confidence trick."

There was silence, during which Racic seemed to commune with his sea. Then he said, "I trust you. Yes, I will do this if I can."

"Then go into Mirna. They're very likely having a drink on the waterfront."

Mirko's boat passed them as they came in, and Mirko waved, calling, *"Dobro vece!"*

On the jetty stood a queue of tourists, waiting to be ferried back to the Adriatic or to the hotel at Vrt. There were perhaps a dozen people, and Philip and Iris Nyman brought up the end of the line. It worked out better than Wexford could have hoped. The first four got into Josip's boat, bound for Vrt, the next group into Mirko's which, with its capacity of only eight, was inadequate to take the Nymans.

"Hotel Adriatic?" said Philip Nyman. Then he recognized Wexford. "Well, well, we meet again! Had a good day?"

Wexford replied that he had been to Dubrovnik, and helped the girl into the boat. She thanked him, seeming less nervous, and even gave him a diffident smile.

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The motor started and they were off.

"I saw you out in your dinghy yesterday," said Wexford.

"Did you?" Philip Nyman looked strangely gratified. "We can't use it tonight, though. It's not safe after dark and you've really got to be in swimming costumes. We're dining at your hotel with an English couple we met yesterday and we thought we'd have a romantic walk back along the path."

They were rather more dressed up than usual. Nyman wore a cream-colored safari suit, his wife a yellow and black dress and high-heeled black sandals. Wexford was on the alert for an invitation to join them for dinner, and was surprised when none came.

Both the Nymans lit cigarettes. Wexford noticed Racic stiffen. He had learned enough about the man's principles and shibboleths to know his feelings about pollution, and those cigarette butts would certainly end up in the sea. Anger with his passengers would make him all the more willing to fulfill his promise.

But for the moment he remained silent. They rounded the point onto a sea on which the sun seemed to have laid a skin of gold.

"So beautiful!" said Iris Nyman.

"A pity you have to go so soon."

"We're staying till Saturday," said Nyman, though without renewing his suggestion that they and the Wexfords should meet again. The girl took a last draw on her cigarette and threw it overboard.

"Oh, well," said Nyman, "there's so much muck in there already, a bit more won't do any harm," and he cast his still-lighted butt into the ripples of melted gold.

They were approaching the hotel landing stage and Racic cut the motor. Nyman felt in his pocket for change. It was Wexford who got up first. He said to Racic as the Yugoslav made the boat fast, "I've had a splendid day. Thanks very much indeed."

He couldn't see them but he fancied the amused glance Nyman would have given his wife at this display of the Englishman's well-known assumption that all but cretins speak his language.

Racic drew himself up to his not very great height. What accent he had, what stiltedness and syntactical awkwardnesses, seemed to be lost. "I'm glad you enjoyed it. I certainly did. Give my regards to your wife and tell her I hope to see her soon."

There was no sound from the Nymans. They got out of the boat, Racic saying, "Let me give you a hand, madam." Nyman's voice

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sounded stifled when he produced his twenty dinars and muttered, "Thank you. Good night."

Neither said a word to Wexford. They didn't look back. They walked away and his eyes followed them.

"Did I do all right, Reg? I was moved by the foul contamination of my sea."

Absently, Wexford said, still staring, "You did fine."

"What do you look at with such concentration?"

"Legs," said Wexford. "Thanks again and see you tomorrow."

They would be gone by now, he thought, into the hotel. He swung up the path, glanced back, and there they were, not about to join their new friends, but off back along the shore to Mirna. He entered the hotel and took the elevator to his room. Dora wasn't back yet. Feeling rather shaken, he lay down on one of the twin beds. That, at any rate, was far from what he had expected. And what now? Somehow get hold of the Dubrovnik police? He reached for the phone to call reception, dropped it again when Dora walked in.

She came up to him in consternation. "Are you all right, darling?"

His blood pressure, his heart, too much sun—he could tell what she was thinking. It was rare for him to take a rest in the daytime. "Of course I am. I'm fine." He sat up. "Dora, something most peculiar—"

"You're detecting again! I knew it." She kicked off her shoes and threw open the doors to the balcony. "You haven't even asked me if I've had a nice day."

"I can see you have. Come, my dear, don't be difficult. I always like to think you're the only woman I know who isn't difficult." She looked at him warily, but she was mollified. "Listen," he said. "Do something for me. Describe the woman we saw on the walls."

"Iris Nyman? What *do* you mean?"

"Just do as I ask, there's a good girl."

"You're mad. You *have* had a touch of the sun. Well, I suppose if it humors you . . . Medium height, good figure, very tanned, about thirty, geometric haircut. She was wearing a jade-green halter top, and a blue and green and pink skirt."

"Now describe the woman we saw with Nyman on Monday."

"It's no different, except for a black top and a stole."

Wexford nodded. He got off the bed, walked past her onto the balcony, and said, "They're not the same woman."

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"What on earth are you suggesting?"

"I wish I knew," said Wexford, "but I know the Iris Nyman we saw on the walls is not the Iris Nyman I saw in Mirna on Monday morning, that we saw that night, that we saw yesterday, and that I saw this evening."

"You're letting your imagination run away with you. You are, Reg. That hair, for instance, it was so striking, and those clothes, and being with Philip Nyman."

"Don't you see you've named the very things that would be used to make anyone think they were the same woman? Neither of us saw her face that first time. Neither of us heard her voice. We only noticed the striking things about her."

"Then what makes you think they're not the same?"

"Her legs. The legs are different. You drew my attention to them. One might say you set me off on this."

Dora leaned helplessly over the balcony rail. "Then I wish I hadn't. Reg, you never discuss cases with me at home. Why do it here?"

"There's no one else."

"Thanks very much. All this about not being the same woman, it's nonsense. You've dreamed it up. Why would anyone try and fake a thing like that? Come to that, *how* could anyone?"

"Easily. All you need is a female accomplice of similar build and age. On Saturday or Sunday she had her hair cut and dyed and assumed Iris Nyman's clothes. I mean to find out why."

Dora turned on him a cold stony look. "No, Reg, no. I'm not being difficult. I'm just behaving like any normal woman would when she goes on holiday and finds her husband can't leave his job at home for just two weeks. This is the first foreign holiday I've had in ten years. If you'd been sent here to watch these people, if it was work, I wouldn't say a word. But it's just something you've dreamed up because you can't relax and enjoy the sun and the sea like other people."

"Okay," said her husband, "look at it that way." He touched her cheek, gently rubbing it. "Don't give me that Gorgon face. I've said I won't let this spoil your holiday, and I won't. And now I'm going to have a bath."

She heard the taps running behind the closed door. Impotent despair nearly brought tears to her eyes. It was bad enough at home hardly ever seeing him, the Chief Constable or Inspector Burden always on the phone when they were just going out, the

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long lonely evenings, the anxiety she never revealed to him. Tomorrow, she thought, he would be back in his element, conferring with the Dubrovnik police, as likely as not flying to Belgrade or even to London without her.

She did something she had never done before in any hotel at home or abroad. She picked up the phone and asked them to send her up a double Bacardi and soda. *That* would go on his bill, and serve him right.

Not much more than twelve hours later Wexford was walking the waterside path to Mirna. The sun was already hot and there was a speedboat out in the bay. Carpet sellers were beginning to spread their wares in the market place, and the cafés were open for those who wanted coffee and even, at this hour of the morning, for those who wanted plum brandy.

The Bosnia, most of it mercifully concealed by pines and ranks of cypresses, looked from close to, with its floors in plate-like layers and its concrete flying buttresses, more like an Unidentified Flying Object come to rest in the woods than a holiday hotel. Wexford crossed a forecourt as big as a football field and entered a foyer that wouldn't have disgraced some capital city's Palace of Justice.

The receptionist spoke good English.

"Mr. and Mrs. Nyman checked out last evening, sir."

"But surely they expected to stay another three days?"

"I cannot tell you, sir. They left last evening before dinner."

So that was that.

"What are you going to do now?" said Dora over a late breakfast. "Have a hilarious cops-and-robbers car chase up the Dalmatian Coast?"

"I'm going to wait and see. And in the meantime I'm going to enjoy my holiday and see that you enjoy yours." Wexford watched her relax and smile for the first time since the previous evening.

The Nymans were at the back of his mind all the time, but he did manage to enjoy the rest of his holiday. Werner and Trudi took them to Mostar to see the Turkish bridge. They went on a coach trip to Budva, and the members of the taxi-boat syndicate ferried them from Mirna to Vrt and out to Lokrum. It was in secret that Wexford daily bought a London newspaper, a day old and three times its normal price. He wasn't sure why he did so, what he hoped or feared.

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On their last morning he nearly didn't bother. After all, he would be home in not much more than 24 hours and then he would have to take some action. But as he passed the reception desk, Dora having already entered the dining room for breakfast, the clerk held out the newspaper to him as a matter of course.

Wexford thanked him—and there it was on the front page.

Disappearance of Tycoon's Daughter, said the headline. *Beachwear King Fears Kidnap Plot.*

The text beneath read: "Mrs. Iris Nyman, 32, failed to return to her North London home from a shopping expedition yesterday. Her father, Mr. James Woodhouse, Chairman of Sunsports Limited, a leading manufacturer of beachwear, fears that his daughter may have been kidnaped and expects a ransom note. Police are taking a serious view.

"Mrs. Nyman's husband, 33-year-old Philip Nyman, said at the couple's house in Flask Walk, Hampstead, today, 'My wife and I had just got back from a motoring holiday in Italy and Yugoslavia. On the following morning Iris went out shopping and never returned. I am frantic with worry. She seemed so happy and relaxed.'

"Mr. Woodhouse's company, of which Mrs. Nyman is a director, was this year involved in a vast takeover bid as a result of which two other major clothing firms were absorbed into Sunsports Ltd. The company's turnover last year was in the region of £100,000,000."

There was a photograph of Iris Nyman in black glasses. Wexford would have been hard put to it to say whether this was of the woman on the walls or the woman in Mirna.

That night they gave Racic a farewell dinner at the Dubrovacka restaurant.

"Do not say, Reg, what they all say, that you will come back next year. Dalmatia is beautiful to you and *Gospoda* Wexford now, but a few days and the memory will fade. Someone will say, San Marino for you next time, or Ibiza, and there you will go. Is it not so?"

"I said I shall be back," said Wexford, "and I meant it." He raised his glass of *Posip.* "But not in a year's time. It'll be sooner than that."

Three hundred and sixty-two days sooner, as Racic pointed out. "And here I am, sitting in the *vrt* of your *kucica!*"

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"Reg, we shall have you fluent in Serbo-Croat yet."

"Alas, no. I must be back in London again tomorrow night."

They were in the Yugoslav's garden, halfway up the terraced hill behind Mirna, sitting in wicker chairs under his vine and under his fig tree. Pink and white and red oleanders shimmered in the twilight, and above their heads bunches of small green grapes hung between the slats of a canopy. On the table was a bottle of *Posip* and the remains of a dinner of king prawns and Dalmatian buttered potatoes, salad and bread and big ripe peaches.

"And now we have eaten," said Racic, "you will please tell me the tale of the important business that brought you back to Mirna so pleasantly soon. It concerns Mr. and Mrs. Nyman?"

"Ivo, we shall have you a policeman yet."

Racic laughed and refilled Wexford's glass. Then he looked serious. "Not a laughing matter, I think, not pleasant."

"Far from it. Iris Nyman is dead. Murdered, unless I am much mistaken. This afternoon I accompanied the Dubrovnik police out into the bay and we took her body out of the cave on Vrapci."

"Zaboga! You cannot mean it! That girl who was at the Bosnia and came out with her husband in my boat?"

"No, not that one. She's alive and in Athens, from where, I imagine, she will be extradited."

"I do not understand. Tell me the tale from the beginning."

Wexford leaned back in his chair and looked up through the vines at the violet sky where the first stars had begun to show. "I'll have to start with the background," he said. "Iris Nyman was the daughter and only child of James Woodhouse, the chairman of a British company called Sunsports Ltd, which makes sports and beachwear and has a large export trade. She married when she was very young, less than twenty, a junior salesman in her father's firm. After the marriage Woodhouse made her a director, settled a lot of money on her, bought her a house in one of the best parts of London, and gave her a company car. To justify her company fees and expenses, she was in the habit of annually making a trip to holiday resorts in Europe with her husband, ostensibly to wear Sunsports clothes and note who else was wearing them, and also to study the success of rival markets. Probably, she simply holidayed.

"The marriage was not a happy one. At any rate, Philip Nyman was not happy. Iris was a typically arrogant rich girl who ex-

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pected always to have her own way. Besides, the money and the house and the car were all hers. He remained a salesman. Then, a year or so ago, he fell in love with a cousin of Iris', a girl called Anna Ashby. Apparently Iris knew nothing about this, and her father certainly didn't."

"Then how can you—?" Racic interrupted.

"These affairs are always known to someone, Ivo. One of Anna's friends has made a statement to Scotland Yard. That is the background. Now for what happened a month or so ago.

"The Nymans had arranged to motor down as usual to the South of France, but this time to cross northern Italy and spend a week or ten days here on the Dalmatian Coast. Anna Ashby had planned to spend part of the summer with friends in Greece, so, *at Iris' invitation,* she was to accompany the Nymans as far as Dubrovnik where she would stay a few days with them, then go on by air to Athens.

"In Dubrovnik, after the three of them had been there a few days, Iris got hold of the idea of bathing off Vrapci. Perhaps she wanted to bathe in the nude, perhaps she had already been on the 'topless' beach at St. Tropez. I don't know. Philip Nyman has admitted nothing of this. Up until the time I left, he was still insisting his wife had returned to England with him."

"It was your idea, then, that this poor woman's body was concealed on the Isle of Sparrows?"

"It was a guess," said Wexford. "I overheard some words, I was later told a lie. I'm a policeman. Whether they went to Vrapci on Saturday, June 18th, or Sunday, June 19th, I can't tell you. Suffice it that they did go—in that inflatable dinghy of theirs. The three of them went but only two came back, Nyman and Anna Ashby."

"They killed this poor lady?"

Wexford looked thoughtful, sipped his wine. "I think so, yes. Of course there's a possibility that she drowned, that it was an accident. But in that case wouldn't any normal husband have immediately informed the proper authority? If he had recovered the body, wouldn't he have brought it back with him? We are awaiting the results of the post-mortem, but even if that shows no wounds or bruises on the body, even if the lungs are full of water, I shall be very surprised if Nyman or Anna, or the two of them, didn't hasten her death or watch her drown."

Both were silent for a moment, Racic nodding slowly as he di-

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gested what Wexford had told him. Then he got up and fetched from the house a candelabrum, but thinking better of it, switched on an electric lamp attached to the wall.

"Any light will attract the insects, but at least there they will not trouble us. So it was this Anna Ashby who came to Mirna, posing as Mrs. Nyman?"

"According to the manager of the hotel in Dubrovnik where the three of them had been staying, Nyman checked out and paid his bill early on the evening of Sunday, June 19th. Neither of the women was with him. Of course they weren't. Iris was dead and Anna was at the hairdresser's, having her hair cut and dyed to the same style and color as her cousin's. The police have already found the hairdresser who did the job."

"They came here next," said Racic. "Why didn't they go straight back to England? And now I must ask, surely they did not intend to play this game in England? Even if the two women, as cousins, to a degree resembled each other, this Anna could not hope to deceive a father, close friends, Mrs. Nyman's neighbors."

"The answer to your first question is that to have returned to England a week earlier than expected would have looked very odd. Why? The weather was perfect. Nyman wanted to give the impression they had both been well and happy during their holiday. No, his idea was to make sufficient people here in Yugoslavia believe that Iris was alive after Sunday, the 19th.

"That was why he latched onto us, told us his wife's cousin had been with them and had flown off to Greece. He even got our names and home town out of us. He wanted to be sure of his witnesses if need be. Anna was less bold, of course, she was frightened to death. And Philip, having secured, as he thought, my wife and myself, actually found himself two more English witnesses, though, thanks to your intervention, never kept the appointment to dine with them."

"My intervention?"

"Your excellent English. And now perhaps you'll tell me what you overheard in the boat."

Racic laughed. His strong white teeth gleamed in the lamplight. "I knew she was not Mrs. Nyman, Reg, but that knowledge would not have helped you then, would it? You had seen the lady on the walls, but not, I presume, her marriage document. I thought to myself, why should I tell this busybody of a policeman, this interferer with the private lives of others, the secrets of my

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passengers? But now, here goes, to use an idiom. Reg, the lady said, 'I feel so guilty. It is terrible what we have done,' and he replied, 'Everyone here thinks you are my wife, and no one at home will suspect a thing. One day you will be and we shall be able to forget all this.' Would you have supposed they were talking of murder or of illicit passion?"

"Well, Nyman must have thought we'd confer, you and I, and jump to the former conclusion. Or maybe he'd forgotten exactly what he had said. He has rather a way of doing that."

"And after they left?"

"Anna was to travel on Iris' passport in the hope that it would be stamped at at least one frontier. In fact, it was stamped at two, the frontier between Yugoslavia and Italy, and again at Calais. At Dover Anna presumably left him and caught the first plane to Athens she could get. Nyman went home alone, reaching there in the night of June 28th, the precise date on which he and his wife had planned to return. On the following afternoon he informed his father-in-law and the police that Iris was missing."

"I see," said Racic. "He hoped the search for her or her body would be confined to England, because he had incontrovertible proof she had stayed with him in Mirna and had traveled back with him to England. No one would think of looking for her here, for it was known to many witnesses she had left here alive. But what did he hope to gain? Surely, if your laws are like ours, and I believe all laws are alike in this, without her body it would be years before he could inherit her money or marry again?"

"You're right. But this was not a premeditated murder. It simply happened, fortuitously. Produce the body, and he and Anna stood the chance of being tried for murder, an unpleasant thing anywhere but terrifying in a foreign country. Conceal the body where it may never be found or not found until it is beyond identification, announce that his wife was missing in England, and he gets the sympathy of his powerful father-in-law and certainly his house to live in and his car to drive. He keeps his job which he would have lost if he had divorced Iris, and very likely all or some of her allowance transferred to him. Anna gets her hair back to its natural color—brown, incidentally—lets it grow out, returns home, and they resume their friendship. One day Iris will be presumed dead and they can marry."

Racic cut himself a slice of bread and nibbled at an olive.

"I see it all, or nearly all. I see that, but for your presence here

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in Mirna, the conspiracy had every chance of success. What I don't see is, if this woman made herself look so like the woman you saw on the walls, if she had the same hair and clothes—but I am a fool! You saw her face?"

"I didn't see her face and I didn't hear her voice. Dora and I saw her very briefly, and then only from the back."

"Then it is beyond my comprehension."

"The legs," said Wexford. "The legs were different."

"But, my dear Reg, my dear policeman, surely the leg of one brown-skinned slender young woman is much like the leg of such another? Or was there a mole perhaps or a scar?"

"Not as far as I know. The only time I saw the true Iris Nyman she wore a skirt that covered her legs to mid-calf. In fact, I could see very little of her legs."

"Then I am flummoxed!"

"Ankles," said the Chief Inspector. "There are two types of normal ankle in this world, and the difference between them can only be seen from the back. In one type the calf seems to join the heel with a narrowing but no distinct shaft. In the other, the type of beauty, the Achilles Tendon, makes a long slender shaft with deep indentations on either side of it beneath the ankle bones. I saw Iris Nyman's legs only from behind and in her the Achilles Tendon was not apparent. It was a flaw in her appearance.

"When I first noticed Anna Ashby's legs *from behind* as she was getting off your boat, I observed the long shaft of the tendon leading up into the muscle of a shapely calf. She had no flaw in her legs, but you might call that perfection her Achilles Heel."

"*Zaboga!* Beauty, eh? Only two types in the world?" Racic extended one foot and rolled up his trouser leg. Wexford's was already rucked up. In the lamplight they peered down at each other's calves from behind. "Yours are all right," said Racic. "In fact, they are fine. In the beauty class."

"So are yours, you old professor and boatman."

Racic burst out laughing. "*Tesko meni!* Two elderly gentlemen who should know better, airing their limbs in an ankle competition! Whatever next?"

"Well, I shouldn't," said Wexford, "but next let's finish the *Posip*."

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AND THEN THERE WAS ONE

by CARYL BRAHMS and S. J. SIMON

There were six passengers in the third-class railway compartment: the Burly Man, the Observant Man, the Angry Man, the Man with the Cough, the Man with the Cold, and the Man in the Snuff-Colored Suit—and they were reading: the *Greyhound Express,* the *Daily Express,* the *New Statesman,* the *New Leader,* and WHO KILLED THE COUNT? The Burly Man was absorbed, the Observant Man was looking out of the window, the Angry Man's veins were swelling visibly, the Man with the Cough coughed, the Man with the Cold kept blowing his nose, and the Man in the Snuff-Colored Suit turned the pages of WHO KILLED THE COUNT? feverishly while his hair stood on end. It was clear that he hadn't the slightest idea.

The engine whistled. The train went into a tunnel. The compartment went black.

When it was light again, the Man with the Cough had stopped coughing. He was lying on the floor with a knife in his back.

Five passengers rose as one. They bent over the body.

"Dead," said the Observant Man.

"Kicked the bucket," said the Burly Man.

"Stabbed in the back," said the Man with the Cold.

"Now there'll be an inquest!" said the Angry Man.

"Oh, dear," said the Man in the Snuff-Colored Suit.

Five passengers looked at each other. Four passengers reached for the communication cord.

"Wait!" said the Observant Man. He pointed to a notice.

PENALTY FOR IMPROPER USE—£5, it read.

Four passengers thought better of it.

His authority established, the Observant Man put himself in charge.

"Everybody stay where you are," he said needlessly. "This is a murder and one of us is a killer. We are all"—he pointed out gravely—"under equal suspicion."

The Angry Man rounded on him.

"Does this mean, sir," he demanded, "that you suspect me?"

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The Man with the Cold sneezed.

"Murder or no murder, I'm not missing the first race at White City," said the Burly Man. He brandished his *Greyhound Express.*

"Oh, dear," said the Man in the Snuff-Colored Suit.

The Observant Man silenced them all with a gesture.

"One of us is a killer," he resumed. "We all had the opportunity. One of us had the means." He pointed starkly to the knife. "It should be possible by a simple process of elimination—"

The engine whistled. The train went into a tunnel. The compartment went dark.

When it was light again, the Observant Man was lying beside the Man with the Cough. A knife was sticking in his back.

The elimination seemed to have started.

"Now look here," said the Angry Man, "this is getting beyond a joke."

"I'll say it is," agreed the Burly Man.

"Oh, dear," said the Man in the Snuff-Colored Suit.

The Man with the Cold gazed fascinated at the bodies.

"Are there any more tunnels on the line?" he asked, worried.

The engine whistled. The compartment went black.

When it was light again, the Man with the Cold was lying on the floor with a knife in his back.

The Angry Man controlled himself with a mighty effort.

"Three of us left," he said, "and one of us a killer. I put it to you, gentlemen, that the two innocent men must combine to protect themselves against the guilty."

The engine whistled. The train went into a tunnel. The compartment went black.

When it was light again, it was evident that they hadn't.

Only two men were left alive!

The Burly Man advanced on the Man in the Snuff-Colored Suit.

"Well, old bean," he said, "this makes things simple. Either you did it or—" he came closer—"I did."

"Oh, dear," said the Man in the Snuff-Colored Suit. He backed.

The Burly Man followed and stuck out his chin.

"Well," he demanded. "Is it you or me?"

The engine whistled. The compartment went black.

When it was light again, the Man in the Snuff-Colored Suit stood looking down at five backs with five knives in them. WHO KILLED THE COUNT? fluttered from his hands.

"Oh, dear," he said. "It must be me."

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

Award time is an exciting period, whether it is Oscars for film, Emmys for television Tonys for theater, or Edgars for mystery. This year has been no exception, with some unusually historic and popular presentations.

Since the MWA Awards Banquet coincided with the Second International Congress of Crime Writers this year, a special significance was attached to the presentation of the Grand Master, and three women were honored—the first time in history that more than one such award was made. The recipients were Dorothy B. Hughes of the United States, Ngaio Marsh of New Zealand, and Daphne du Maurier of England.

The other Edgars:

Best Novel: *Catch Me: Kill Me* by William H. Hallahan (Bobbs-Merrill).

Best First Novel: *A French Finish* by Robert Ross (Putnam).

Best Fact Crime: *By Persons Unknown* by George Jonas and Barbara Amiel (Grove).

Best Short Story: "Chance After Chance" by Thomas Walsh (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine,* November).

Best Motion Picture: *The Late Show,* screenplay by Robert Benton (Warner Brothers).

Best Television Drama (Series): "The Thighbone Is Connected to the Kneebone" on *Quincy,* teleplay by Tony Lawrence and Lou Shaw (NBC).

Best Television Drama (Special): *Men Who Love Women* (pilot for *Rosetti and Ryan*), teleplay by Gordon Cotler and Don M. Mankiewicz (NBC).

Best Paperback Original: *The Quark Maneuver* by Mike John (Ballantine).

Best Critical, Biographical or Autobiographical Study: *Rex Stout: A Biography* by John McAleer (Little, Brown).

Best Juvenile: *A Really Weird Summer* by Eloise Jarvis McGraw (Margaret K. McElderry Books, Atheneum).

Special Awards:

Dilys Winn for *Murder Ink* (Workman).

Allen J. Hubin for a decade as

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editor of *The Armchair Detective.*

Barney Miller, Danny Arnold, executive producer (ABC).

"I Am My Brother's Keeper" (The Lifer's Group), Richard N. Hughes, executive producer (WPIX editorial report).

Lawrence Treat, editor, *Mystery Writer's Handbook* (Writer's Digest).

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

For many of us growing up our first images of terror and melodrama lurked in the witch-woods and shadow palaces of the Disney films. In recent years the Disney Studio's sense of mystery has become rather bland; happily, though, that picture is changing.

Soon to be released is *Candleshoe,* from Michael Innes' novel *Christmas at Candleshoe,* reshaped by the David Swift screenplay into an appealing suspense film in which an American tomboy is coached into posing as the lost heiress to a vast English estate. The claimant is played by the delightful young Jodie Foster, and if you have not yet caught this accomplished performer as the winsome and in every sense winning child murderess in the Canadian film, *The Little Girl Who Lives Down the Lane,* you have missed the most intelligent thriller of last year.

As with everything bearing the Walt Disney stamp, *Candleshoe* is strictly family fare, but the familiar substitute-heir tale is nourished with good players (David Niven, Helen Hayes), lovely footage of the English countryside, and a heroic treasure hunt replete with cryptic clues—"Under foot, in the Great Hall, look high, look low, discover all"—that may well leave you anxious and cheering.

Currently shooting at the Disney Burbank lot (as one might imagine, the cleanest, friendliest studio in Hollywood) for release next year is another film of interest, *North Avenue Irregulars*—likewise clean and friendly, but surprisingly gutsy. Taken from a true story, it tells of a Presbyterian minister newly assigned to a corrupt suburban town who, like Lot, looks for "a few trustworthy men" for a campaign to fight the mob—but can't find even one. Instead he is aided by five women parishioners, an unlikely band of Irregulars (used in the unofficial, Baker Street sense) who ultimately triumph.

And what a team of "Our Ladies" it is: included are cool, prim church secretary Susan Clark, housewife Barbara Harris (who certainly rose above Hitch-

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cock's *Family Plot),* divorcee Cloris Leachman, and choir leader Karen Valentine. By no means a blueprint for either civic or feminist activism, *North Avenue Irregulars*—the saga of the Valkyries of New Campton's North Avenue Church—promises to be just good fun, a crime comedy of a most unusual bent and very positive values.

An in-depth study of Hollywood's smoking-jacket-and-trenchcoat brigade of screen detectives has certainly long been awaited; Jon Tuska's bulky and picture-filled *The Detective in Hollywood* (Doubleday, $14.95) is such an achievement. Film historian Tuska (he previously tackled the western genre in *The Filming of the West*) has such a runaway devotion to the minuti of obscure titles he is most oft infuriatingly undisciplined, but ways interesting.

And as he appears to have terviewed every character play who ever waved a tommygun toppled dead out of a closet, t book is a chatty oral history the genre . . . as well as being work of affectionate and lavi scholarship, examining skills diverse as those of Basil Ra bone and Humphrey Bogart mention just two actors out dozens), a fraternity of scre detectives at long last front a center and finally given th due. The author's highly persor approach to his task may dism and even outrage you, but h contribution is monumental.

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INTERVIEW: DOROTHY B. HUGHES

The crowning achievement for a mystery writer is receiving an Edgar Allan Poe Award from the Mystery Writers of America, but the *ne plus ultra* of those awards is reserved for the handful of towering figures in the world of mystery: the Grand Master Award, presented for lifetime achievement. This year, Dorothy Hughes, novelist and critic, received the much-deserved honor. At one time a prolific novelist (two of her books, *The So Blue Marble* and *In a Lonely Place,* were mentioned in "The Haycraft-Queen Definitive Library of Detective-Crime-Mystery Fiction"), she has just produced her first book fifteen years, *Erle Stanley Gar ner: The Case of the Real Per Mason* (Morrow, $15).

EQMM: In the 1940s you wei a prolific writer, your books ha excellent reviews and sales, the were successful films, and the you stopped writing. Why?

HUGHES: The answer to that purely domestic; there was il ness in the family. I used to writ anywhere: the automat, th kitchen, while cowboys and Ind ans were played around me. Bu my mother lived with me, and sh took ill. And my husband was be ginning to decline in health ther

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At the same time, my own children had grown up and I had grandchildren, and I had them to take care of as well. There was no tranquility.

EQMM: But you continued to review books.

HUGHES: Yes, I reviewed during all those years. That was easy because, you see, I would rather read than anything in the wide world. When I was writing books, I never allowed myself to read until I had written a certain number of pages each day. After I did my stint (and I adhered to the Hemingway method of stopping high—when the work was going well—so that it was easy to start again), I read a great deal.

EQMM: And you found that tranquility was less essential for reviewing than for writing fiction?

HUGHES: It could be done in shorter bursts; it is not so sustained. The reviewing kept me writing. I took—I *take*—reviewing very seriously. I make several drafts, and amend, and go over it and over it. I think I take more care with my reviews than I ever did with my fiction.

EQMM: It has been fifteen years since your last book and now, suddenly, you produce a huge biography of Erle Stanley Gardner, which seems far more exhausting and time-consuming than a novel. How did you get involved in it?

HUGHES: Somebody asked me. Lawrence Hughes (no relation), the president of Morrow, gave me the challenge, and I told him I'd be delighted to try it. I'm sure the reason I was asked is that I always reviewed Gardner seriously, and generally favorably. Jean Gardner (his widow) believed that I was a good choice to do the biography because I knew what he was trying to do in his writing: he wasn't attempting poetry, just to tell good stories, which he did. So I researched the book for over a year; it was in the works for three years altogether.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Putting Sherlock Holmes on the track of Jack the Ripper is not a new idea. Since the great detective and the Whitechapel murderer appeared on the London scene within a year of each other, fictional encounters between them have seemed irresistible and inevitable to a number of writers, among them Ellery Queen and W. S. Baring-Gould. Their latest imaginary duel, coming as it does on the tail-end of an overwhelming Sherlockian fad and a period of creative theorizing by a number of keen Ripperologists, could easily be lost in the shuffle.

*** Michael Dibdin: *The Last Sherlock Holmes Story,* Pantheon,

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$7.95. One of the few recent Holmes pastiches written by an Englishman rather than an American, Dibdin's book earns its rating on the basis of style, suspense, readability, and ingenuity. But the same readers who thought Nicholas Meyer in *The Seven Percent Solution* and Robert Lee Hall in *Exit Sherlock Holmes* were guilty of Going Too Far in their speculation will react even more negatively here. And for once I have to agree with them.

*** Simon Brett: *Star Trap,* Scribners, $7.95. Charles Paris's third case involves a musical version of Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* on its way to London's West End. As delightfully written as its predecessors, this would be an absorbing novel of the theater even without the mystery plot. The criminal's motivation is a little hard to accept, though, and there are coincidences, somewhat explained perhaps by the close-knittedness of the English theatrical world, but still niggling.

*** Stephen Marlowe: *The Valkyrie Encounter,* Putnam, $9.95. The news that this novel concerns the attempt by German army officers to assassinate Hitler in 1944 is bound to bring a feeling of *déjà vu* to readers of recent espionage fiction, but this is a fine piece of story-telling without the impression of superficial research that marks some World War II thrillers. His publishers claim this is only Marlowe's ninth novel. What were all those Chester Drum paperbacks—greeting cards?

*** John Ives: *Fear in a Handful of Dust,* Dutton, $8.95. Can four psychotherapists (one of them, of course, a beautiful woman) left naked in the middle of the Arizona desert by a psychopathic killer survive? The account of their efforts is well written and genuinely suspenseful, although, as in so many survival novels, the characters are less interesting than their predicament.

*** Anna Gilbert: *A Family Likeness,* St. Martin's, $8.95. Set like its predecessor, *The Look of Innocence,* in rural nineteenth-century England, this second novel is gentle and non-violent but unmistakably worthy of the name mystery. Gilbert is notable for her mellow, graceful style and the firm refusal of her plots to develop along predictable lines.

*** John Wainwright: *Do Nothin' Till You Hear From Me,* St. Martin's, $7.95. Laying on the slang like a British equivalent of Robert Leslie Bellem or Michael Avallone, Wainwright brings his customary zest and gusto to this tale of a latter day Big Band and its nostalgic leader, Maurice "Lucky" Luckhurst. The very interesting jazz music background overwhelms the rather slight mystery plot for much of the distance, but Wainwright has a feel for fair play clueing that is always welcome.

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

ELLERY QUEEN'S A MULTITUDE OF SINS, edited by Ellery Queen. The Dial Press, $8.95.

The dictionary defines sin as "any violation, especially a willful or deliberate one of religious or moral principles," and adds "see crime." *A Multitude of Sins* is the 32nd annual collection of short stories selected by Ellery Queen, these collected from the best published in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* in 1976. It includes the whole catalogue of crime from petty theft to multiple murder. One of the stories, "Like a Terrible Scream" by Etta Revesz, was awarded the Edgar by the Mystery Writers of America as the best mystery short story published in 1976.

THE SPOILS OF ARARAT, by Robert Katz. Houghton Mifflin Company, $8.95.

In this first-class parody of the international thriller, NASA satellite photos have revealed a mysterious ice-covered bulge high on Mt. Ararat. Archaeology professor Tony McIntyre is among a trio of climbers sent to determine what it is by the CIA, whose major preoccupation is clearly *not* the possibility that it might indeed be Noah's Ark. Harassed by the local bureaucracy and pursued by Turkish soldiers, Tony and his colleagues start up the mountain. What they find on top is a surprise so unexpected that the mission almost collapses in treachery and death. Katz is the author of six previous books, including DEATH IN ROME and THE CASSANDRA CROSSING.

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	DISCOUNTED PRICE
Brett, Simon	STAR TRAP	Scribners	$7.95	$6.35
Dibdin, Michael	THE LAST SHERLOCK HOLMES STORY	Pantheon	7.95	6.35
Gilbert, Anna	A FAMILY LIKENESS	St. Martin's	8.95	6.95
Hughes, Dorothy B.	ERLE STANLEY GARDNER: THE CASE OF THE REAL PERRY MASON	Morrow	15.00	12.00
Ives, John	FEAR IN A HANDFUL OF DUST	Dutton	8.95	6.95
Katz, Robert	THE SPOILS OF ARARAT	Houghton Mifflin	8.95	6.95
Marlowe, Stephen	THE VALKYRIE ENCOUNTER	Putnam	9.95	7.95
Queen, Ellery, ed.	ELLERY QUEEN'S A MULTITUDE OF SINS	The Dial Press	8.95	6.95
Tuska, Jon	THE DETECTIVE IN HOLLYWOOD	Doubleday	14.95	12.00
Wainwright, John	DO NOTHIN' TILL YOU HEAR FROM ME	St. Martin's	7.95	6.35

*PLEASE NOTE: ADD 10% TO DISCOUNT PRICE ON ALL CANADIAN ORDERS.

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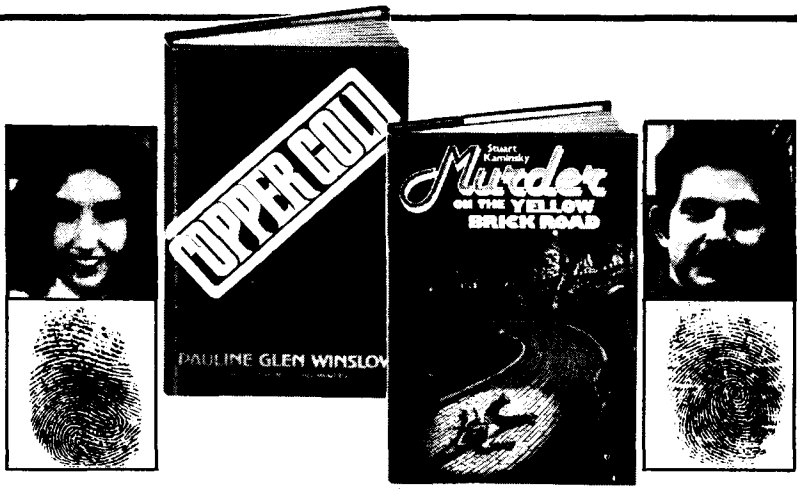

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a *NEW* short story by

THOMAS WALSH

Harling Rossiter was the last of the Rossiters—"real quality folks in these parts." He had been born with a platinum spoon in his mouth, had never worked a day in his misspent life, and was accustomed, of course, to having his own way—especially with women . . .

THE LAST OF THE ROSSITERS

by THOMAS WALSH

There was no explaining the thing. It simply acted out of itself in some way, flashing into life at the first moment of contact between them, swift as a thunderbolt and far quicker than tinder to match. They had absolutely no previous knowledge of each other, and in consequence there was no basis for even the most instinctive of animal reactions; and yet faster than thought it was there between them, and they each knew that it was. The man hated the dog. The dog hated the man.

The man, however, immediately glossed over the knowledge since later on, in all likelihood, that would be advantageous to him. The dog, compelled to act with honest and primitive simplicity, could not. At once he jumped up on the porch, all four legs stiffened out, uttered a low ominous growl of warning at the man, and bared his teeth.

"Now, Rummy," the girl said, anxiously hurrying forward to him. "Of all things! Now you stop that right away. What in the world is the matter with you?"

For her, although still watching the man, Rummy wagged the end of his tail slightly. He was a big and powerful Labrador Retriever, black as night all over save for handsome and lustrous

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brown eyes, and now those eyes fastened themselves on the man with an unmistakable challenge of the most direct and ominous intensity. He growled once more.

"Perhaps we startled him," the man said, trying casually to pass it off, but wary enough to stop right where he was and to remain there until everything had been put under control. "And he wouldn't have liked that. He wouldn't have liked that at all. Now take it easy, old boy. Dreaming of a nice juicy T-bone, were you?"

The girl, still openly flustered, got hold of Rummy by the collar and led him inside. Then she came back with an evident and uncomfortable flush on her cheeks.

"I'm so sorry," she tried to explain. "Most times he's awful gentle in spite of his size. I can't think what in the world could have got into him."

"No harm done," the man said—narrow sleek head, clipped British moustache, neatly aristocratic sharp features. "They all know they have a job to do and they get rather annoyed when they happen to fall down on it. Blow to their self-pride, you know. That's what irritates them."

"Yes, I imagine so," the girl said. She was a young girl, no more than 18 or 19, with a rather sturdy figure—which Harling Rossiter had always admired in women when they were that age—light brown hair, gawkily awkward way of managing herself, fair enough legs. Tonight she wore a cheap white dress, a little too tight for her—invitingly so?—and stood with a certain uneasy self-consciousness beside the porch glider, not knowing, obviously, whether or not to ask him to sit down; one of the Rossiters, after all, real quality folks in these parts. "But next time," she added, innocent and upset enough to betray herself without realizing it, "I know he'll have better manners for you."

And "next time" could only mean that she was already hoping for next time. But never frighten them off, Harling Rossiter had learned years ago. That would be stupid, especially when they were as young, lonely, innocent, and naive as this one appeared to be. Go slowly and carefully—and act just as shy. Therefore he only paused briefly at the top of the porch steps, hat in hand.

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about that," he said. "Just delighted to give you a lift home from the movies this evening. It wasn't a bad film at all, was it?"

"I really liked it," the girl said, still facing him with that rather

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attractive young awkwardness of hers. "But then I like Robert Redford so much, actually. Don't you?"

And probably, Harling Rossiter thought, she has a picture of Dear Robert up in her bedroom; just that age.

"First time I saw him," he remarked smoothly. The movies tonight had been an escape from pure boredom—but now, he saw, a fortunate boredom. A little rain coming down after the show; the sturdy figure in the tight dress before him; and his car handy. So—"And first time I've seen you. New in town?"

"Well, three months," she admitted, grateful for the way he led the conversation. "I used to live on a farm over in Taylor's Corner, if you know where that is. I just got my job here in the bank last winter, after Mama died."

Taylor's Corner was a much smaller town than even Marlowe Falls, hardly more than a general store, a gas station, and perhaps a dozen or so decrepit wooden houses. So Marlowe Falls, he realized, with its movie theater, its two restaurants, and its old country inn, must be almost a metropolis to her; and Harling Rossiter with his English brogues, his hound's-tooth sports jacket, and the carelessly knotted gold scarf around his throat was not too bad a comparison even with Dear Robert Redford.

But that first night he did not push it—a long dull summer was coming up—or dull until now. He walked down her porch steps rather well satisfied with himself. You never really knew, of course, not until you had tried, but it seemed easy enough to him—just little by little now, step by step.

There was only one jarring note. When he turned at the picket fence to smile at her and to lift his hat courteously, he could see Rummy back of the screened door, with the same ominous glare still fixed on him, and a sudden betraying flash of the strong white teeth under it.

Rotten miserable cur, Harling Rossiter thought angrily; ought to have a bullet put into its head. He had never liked dogs, and dogs had never liked him. But it had been a queer thing with this one. It had very nearly attacked him. As if it knew, somehow; as if it could see everything in Rossiter's head, and right from the start. Yet on the whole he was well contented with himself and drove home looking forward to an enjoyable summer.

Alice Ferguson—that was her name. Not an unattractive little thing and thankfully with an experience of life limited as yet to Taylor's Corner. In short, the kind of sweet Alice in *Ben Bolt* who

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would soon weep with delight when Harling Rossiter gave her a smile and tremble with fear at his frown. For a week then he did not call her, so that she would be properly anxious. But when he did, and when he heard the quick happy catch in her voice, he understood that it was already just about a *fait accompli.*

Harling Rossiter himself did not work at anything. The Rossiters were an old family in Marlowe Falls, in past years the most prominent family, and there was still the big old colonial house out in the good section of Lake Avenue. But that was about all that was left. No longer a regular cleaning woman, a maid, and Hardy the chauffeur, and no longer two or three cars out in the garage. Last year, too, when Harling Rossiter, the last Rossiter of all, had to come home from Europe, it had been necessary to sell the summer place out on the lake to raise tax money, and now,the last of the last, there were only a few thousand dollars left in the town bank.

Eventually, therefore, something would have to be done, but as yet Harling Rossiter had no idea what the something would turn out to be. It was only when Elizabeth Henderson came back to Marlowe Falls as a lonely, recently bereaved, and still rather horse-faced young widow, that a possible solution presented itself. He could always tell about women, and he remembered that years ago Elizabeth Henderson could have been his simply for the asking.

Then why not now? The Hendersons were another old family in Marlowe Falls, suitable even for a Rossiter alliance, and Grandfather Henderson had invested wisely and widely in the stock market way back in the thirties, at depression prices. The rumor in town went that he had left Elizabeth about $2,000,000, and by August, when Harling Rossiter began to think seriously about it, horse face or no horse face, he found himself considerably irritated at having promised sweet Alice so much.

It had proved necessary, however. She had never been with a man before, and although Harling Rossiter did not reproach himself for that fact, taking it as a not unflattering compliment, certain loving assurances had to be given. But come August his usual weariness and boredom were beginning to set in, and by making deliberately cutting remarks about certain manners and crude habits of speech, Harling Rossiter tried to persuade himself that the affair would die a natural death.

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It proved not to be that simple and uncomplicated. On the night he decided to break it off with Alice once and for all, since Elizabeth might hear something, he was informed that she could not let him go, and for the best possible reason. She would not agree to a weekend in New York, with all her expenses paid and nothing asked of her but an overnight visit to a certain clinic that Harling Rossiter knew. She wept at first. She wept wretchedly and endlessly. No, she said, not that, never that. He had said he loved her. He had sworn he did. So marriage was necessary now. There was nothing else for him to do. He had promised!

They were on a lonely dirt road back in the woods near Dark Pond where for some time they had been in the habit of parking while on the way home, and all at once Alice stopped that silly weeping of hers and faced up to him with a resolution and defiance that Harling Rossiter could almost admire in her. Good farm stock had its points occasionally. Even the tone of her voice changed, as if understanding him at last—what he had wanted from her, all he had wanted from her—and she answered him back with cold flashing anger.

"I know what it is," she almost spat out at him. "It's that old hag of a Henderson woman. She has money, hasn't she? So if you can only get rid of me now—well, you won't! I'm not going to let you. I'll tell her about us. I'll tell her the whole thing!"

"Oh?" he said, looking carelessly past her into dark woods, into silent and lonely woods. "I should think you'd have a little more pride, Alice, if you're still incapable of behaving with even a pretense of decent manners. Or is it the country yokel in you—to grovel and humiliate yourself for a lady's sympathy? Because she's a lady, at any rate, where you aren't—and never will be. This summer we both had a little fun together, and that's all. Now it's over. Why can't you accept it? Why continue to be as tiresome as you are now?"

But he had pushed her a little too far. He wanted to hurt, and he had hurt. She brushed the last angry tears from her eyes and got out of the car.

"Now where?" he inquired pleasantly, to hurt a second time. "I'd say it's a little late for you to walk all the way home, Alice. You should have done that the first time you ever came up here with me, back in June. Or didn't you want to, then?"

A ghostly September moon revealed itself back of the clouds. When she turned, it showed her expression as scornful as his, as

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hating as his—which he had not expected. A faint uneasiness stirred in him. Was she serious? He also got out of the car, but she moved quickly away from him.

"I'll have the child," she said, lips curled. "Your child. I'll have it just out of spite, you dirty rotten low skunk, you. Then see if she marries you, when everybody in town knows—but I think not. She's too decent a person. She isn't your kind."

"But you are?" Harling Rossiter drawled. "Why, I never even suspected, dearest. Is that what you mean?"

"No, not quite—" and with a childish defiance in her to face whatever she had to face now, even if all alone and no matter the cost. "Maybe you're Lake Avenue and I'm Taylor's Corner—but I wouldn't lower myself to spit on you after this. Skunk, skunk! Rummy knew what you were the first instant he set eyes on you, where I didn't. You'll even promise love, won't you, to get what you want. You promised it to me, and you'll promise it to her—for the money. Only you'll never get it and I'll see that you won't. Don't touch me!"

But he made no attempt to, not at that moment.

"St-st-st," he said. "You're perfectly right about Lake Avenue and Taylor's Corner. I'm glad you realize it finally. Now just use your head and marry someone your own kind. And let me marry mine."

She ran forward then and slapped him. She slapped him twice, and something very odd happened. It was not the pain, it was partly the blind fury at Taylor's Corner slapping Lake Avenue and partly the realization that Elizabeth Henderson had certain high and old-fashioned standards of conduct. She had always cringed from cheap gossip, and despised meanness in anyone. Which meant, if she ever was told about this—

He reached out and got hold of Taylor's Corner by the two arms, shaking her violently.

"You'll tell no one anything," he gritted. "You'll do as I say! You'll go down to New York next week and you'll—"

But at that she did something even more childishly foolish. She threw back her head and laughed at him. She laughed triumphantly. At that everything shifted in Harling Rossiter, blindly and desperately, and before he quite realized it, he had taken hold of her by the throat. And no longer was it a body seductively desirable to him; he now thought of it with loathing and hatred, as something that had dared to put itself in his way, something un-

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speakably common, ugly, and revolting.

He shook it again, but she stood like a stone, still facing him, still laughing at him. It was not to be endured, not from a common little farm chippie out of Taylor's Corner. If she was stupid enough to—

And she was. They stood face to face like that, her expression stony and unafraid, a venomous triumph in her eyes.

"Never, never!" she screamed. "She'll never marry you, and you know she won't. Take your hands off me. I'm warning you. Rummy!"

It was not an idle threat. In nice weather she always let the damned hound loose before leaving the house, and if it was anywhere near Dark Pond tonight, and if it heard her voice calling— It was necessary to shut off the voice, and he did. His fingers tightened as if of themselves, without the slightest direction on his part, and tightened still more.

She made a few choked sounds and began kicking at him, but a sudden naked fear in her eyes sent an emotion of serene and absolute power flooding through him over Alice, and even over everyone else in the world. He got her back against the car, held her free of the ground there, and bent over her. Perhaps a minute or so passed. Then he straightened.

He discovered that his legs were shaking. He discovered that he had got his handkerchief out and was wiping his face. He put both hands down on the hood, spreading them wide, dropped his head toward them, shook his head, and shook it again. "Alice?" he whispered finally, when he could whisper; but only to make sure. "Alice?"

There was no answer. He had not really expected one. So? So things to do. He got her back into the car, and glared one way along the dirt road, then the other. But there was no one, all clear—and now the rest of it to be done. How?

But that proved simple enough. There was a marshy spot near this side of the pond and an old spade in his car with the box of sand he kept there for winter driving. He was just taking the spade out of his trunk when the dog came.

It came silently at him from out of the trees like a black ghost, from whatever distance it had to cover after it heard the girl calling. It came with a wolfish glitter of eyes and white teeth, the front paws extended, and it came straight for his throat. Only at the last possible instant was he able to get the wooden haft of the

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spade between them to thrust it off.

When it recovered and came at him once more, still with that deadly swiftness and silence, he smashed down at it with the metal blade, and smashed again and again and again. Then he kicked it off the bank into Dark Pond and waited until he had made sure it did not come up.

He dug the grave then and got it occupied. Everything in? Yes—hat, gloves, purse, scarf. He smoothed over the grave and drove back to the state road. No one saw him, and when he got home the gray September mist over the trees had transformed itself into a sudden and torrential downpour. He was very glad it had. It would wash any possible traces of mud from his car—and they could do marvelous things, it came to him, with their scientific laboratories these days. Nothing to worry about now—just quick, quick, and careful, careful.

In the house he stripped himself to the skin, grinning jumpily, and burned every stitch of the clothes he had been wearing. After that he scraped up the ashes with scrupulous care and flushed them away in the downstairs toilet. He brushed his shoes for at least five minutes, with particular attention to the crevices around the heels and soles, and washed off the outsides of them with warm water.

Done then? Yes, all done; mistress and dog. Still, he woke up twice that night in the small hours and each time found that he was making a terrified low whimper deep in his throat. It was not caused by Alice, however. It was, rather, a nightmare that Rummy was coming at him again, its white teeth bared, its eyes glittering.

But when he woke up the next morning there was bright sunshine after the rain; his car looked spotless, and when he called Elizabeth Henderson about eleven o'clock to inquire about a spot of golf, the offer was accepted happily and at once. He had better show himself out and around over the weekend, with not a worry in the world so far as a country clod like Chief of Police Frank Culkin would never determine.

It was over and done. Never again would he have to bother his head about it.

She was not missed until Monday when she did not show up for her clerical job at the State National Bank. But it was rather late Tuesday night, about 9:30, before Chief Culkin stopped by on Lake Avenue with a few questions.

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It was a hot night, and at Culkin's suggestion they sat out on the back porch, which was fully screened. Yes, Harling Rossiter declared manfully there—he'd had three days to go over the thing again and again, and to decide what he had to admit, because it could be proved against him, and what he must not. Saturday night they had dined together at a French restaurant near Lake Champlain, but then on the way home she had started quarreling with him.

"You know," he explained, while mixing a friendly drink for them, "I only felt sorry for the girl—no family at all, and only a child, really—so we had dinner together a few times. That was the whole thing. Why"—man-to-man honesty, both hands outflung for a moment in the most self-explanatory manner possible—"I never so much as kissed her good night, Chief. My word of honor. And now no one's seen her around since Saturday night, you say? I wonder why. I admit she might have developed a silly kid's crush on me. But that's no reason—"

"Hard to say," Culkin put in. "At that age." He was a big burly man with a long dour face and heavily lidded gray eyes, and now without touching his drink the eyes moved a little in Harling Rossiter's direction, though still warily lowered. "Apparently she hasn't been home in three or four days, or since Saturday, at any rate, and even her dog Rummy is gone. Did you take him along with you out to dinner?"

"Why, no," Harling Rossiter answered, as if rather surprised by the question. "I'm afraid Rummy never quite cottoned to me, Chief. But I believe she let him out into the woods before we left. She usually did, when she knew I was coming over that night."

"What time did you bring her home on Saturday?"

"Oh, lord," Harling Rossiter said, in a tone of fond but somewhat petulant helplessness. "That silly kid. But I—well, I didn't bring her home, as a matter of fact. I stopped to get some cigarettes at a drug store in Plattsburg, and when I came out again she was talking to some young fellows in another car. Then she got in with them and called out to me that they were giving her a ride home. I wouldn't have to bother. They were rather fresh and insolent youngsters. Pop, they called me—if you can imagine it. Pop."

"How many young fellows? Did you recognize them? Were they from town here?"

"I don't know—" eager to help now, but of course helpless. "All

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I can tell you is that they were driving an old black Chevrolet sedan. Two or three of them—but nobody I knew. Just young and smart, Chief—and I believe maybe just two of them. I can't even tell you the license number. I simply paid no attention to it."

"Then more's the pity," Culkin told him. He was brooding out at the woods, fingers steepled, and he had not yet touched the friendly drink that had been prepared for him. "Then we might have had some kind of a lead. As it is—or wait a minute. Is that a dog out there by your back fence? Is that Rummy?"

Harling Rossiter's heart jumped—catching horribly, then twisting horribly. Because, turning his head in the direction indicated, he caught sight of something black, quick, and furtive, something that reflected into the porch light a snarl of white teeth and over that the flaming glitter of two savage, hate-filled eyes. It was there only for a breath, then it was gone, but it was long enough to make Harling Rossiter drop his whiskey glass.

"By God!" Culkin said, getting up quickly. "Was it Rummy, do you think? Did you get any kind of a look at it?"

They went down to the lawn and there Culkin got out a flashlight. "And what's this?" he demanded, bending over for something. "A blue and white scarf, it looks like. Would it be the girl's, do you think?"

There was light on the porch behind Harling Rossiter. There was safety back there, a door to be locked. But there was something else now—a road to be followed, a road he had himself created, and with no hesitation at all.

"I don't know," he got out. He was staring at Culkin in the lawn shadows, and Culkin was staring at him, he could be certain of that. An ominous chill breeze stirred, and—and a patter of invisible feet, was it? "She had at least two or three scarves, Chief, and that could be one. I just can't say."

"Damned queer," Culkin muttered, and glanced around edgily. "And where the hell did the dog get to? Here, Rummy, boy."

There was no answer. Under the trees there was only a silence like death itself.

"Well," Culkin said at last, stuffing the scarf into his pocket, "I think I'd better hand this thing over to the State Troopers in Plattsburg soon as I can now. I don't much like the look of it, Mr. Rossiter, sir. All dirty and stained, did you notice—but they might be able to analyze the spots up there and tell where they came from."

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Harling Rossiter, fixed smile on his lips, waved assent. Harling Rossiter nodded. Then he had to go back all alone into the house, just the one dim lamp on the porch, and the lonely woods all around. For perhaps five full minutes he stood motionless by the screen door, with a slight but uncontrollable shiver of his whole body every few seconds. Could it be possible? Could that damned hound have actually . . .

Of course it could! How many stories had he heard of a dog's devotion to a master or mistress? Of a dog that settled itself on a loved one's grave somewhere and never left no matter what inducement was offered? Or a dog forgotten and left behind when its family moved, and who, months and months later, was found to have traveled hundreds and even thousands of miles to track down its owner in a strange city it had never seen before? There had been no way for them to know what had happened and why they had been abandoned—and yet they had known! Their love had been the driving force, but hatred might also serve. And that damned hound had always hated him! So could it be that even in death . . .

Or wait up now! Say that he had not killed it Saturday night, but had only thought he had. What then? It might have floated up into the bank shadows where he did not see it, then lay there for the last couple of days, doggedly regaining its strength. Sometime today it might have blinked its eyes open, crawled up the bank, and then over to the grave of Alice. There it could have pawed at the soft ground—why in God's name had he picked soft ground?—until the body was at least partially uncovered.

After that it would have thought of help, of human help, and to get it might have torn that blue and white scarf from her dead hand. Harling Rossiter had bought it for her.

And then? Then back to town, obviously, to get the help it needed and could not itself give. Or to accuse him, was that it? To prove it beyond any question? Certainly it had been her scarf, and even more certainly it had been laid here at his own doorstep only a few minutes ago, right here in his own yard. Could instinct do that? Could black hate do it? It had been done, no matter what.

And perhaps in a few hours now, at the State Troopers' laboratory up in Plattsburg, the experts might be able to decide where the stains of mud had come from—from somewhere around Dark Pond. So he must act. There was no time to lose. He must be the first one there!

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He drove into town, circling around in several different streets to make sure no one was following him, and then he drove out to the dirt road, still watching his rear-view mirror every few seconds. It was still all right; no one at all was there—and Frank Culkin by now would be halfway to Plattsburg. So boldness and resolution had won for him, and the help of a moon that was coming up a bit later tonight, and in even a more ghostly fashion.

There were white streamers of mist under the trees, and a beating hush that seemed deeper and more threatening, as if alerted now, than any hush that Harling Rossiter had known until this moment. Also, not long after he left his car and had begun to trot forward breathlessly, there was something else. Or did he only imagine the almost inaudible patter of other feet off in the woods behind him? Not human feet—and not even living, perhaps?

All he knew was that they seemed to keep a steadily fixed pace. They stopped when he stopped. They went when he went. Damn hound! It knew everything he knew, everything he thought, and it was leading him on. But there was no turning back now. He had to go on. He had to find out. He had to make sure!

He heard someone else sobbing aloud in wild terror, and he felt someone else stagger and then fall down in the dirt road at full length. Harling Rossiter lay quiet for a moment, to listen for Rummy again—and there was nothing. Then he got up, plunging forward thankfully—and there it was. Always behind him, never to be shaken off: the hound. He sobbed again, plunged ahead even more drunkenly, and came to the pond.

But there even the dim moon tormented him. Heavy clouds shut it off. All he could distinguish was a glitter of stagnant water below, when a slight breeze came and the September mist parted sluggishly to each side. Yes, here—and he crawled forward the last few steps on his hands and knees.

Yes, right here. A big rock on one side, a clump of thin white young birch on the other. So under him now, just in between those two markers—and thank God the moon came out again as suddenly as it had dropped from sight moments ago.

No disturbance, apparently. No arm or leg showing, no bit of white dress, no tip of shoe to be seen anywhere at all. Thank God! Everything was still as carefully concealed as he had left it on Saturday night. He laughed foolishly to himself and even squatted back on his heels like a small child. So all his terror was for nothing! He clapped his hands, at the same time lifting his head

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up quickly and gleefully—and when he did so he saw the hound.

It was just behind him. It stood there silent as death, all black, with long legs and powerful shoulders, and with a wolflike tongue lolling out as if hungrily. It did not move. It could not be heard breathing. It just stood there, and the hush around Harling Rossiter froze into glare ice.

He wanted to get up. He could not. He put both hands out, to fend off, and shook his head. Then at last, lifting its nuzzle skyward, the dog howled. It was a long howl from deep in its chest, as if gloating and exultant, as if savagely vindictive, as if ferociously triumphant at last. Under the great circle of the sky it was like a summons, pitilessly unforgiving, that rang out over the hushed darkness and stillness of the whole earth. Arrow-straight it pierced into the heart like a sinister and icy foretoken of death waiting—and it was answered.

Because other sounds approached now, quite audible sounds. A voice murmured and a second replied to it. Harling Rossiter pushed himself up on both hands, with the expression of a dazed and even lunatic cunning on his face, and from under the trees a powerful flashlight glittered, blinding him. Rossiter flung up an arm to shut it off, and in the blessed dark again, heard one more voice.

It was Chief Culkin's.

"Somewhere right here," he was saying. "Maybe right there where he's kneeling, Lieutenant. I'd take my oath this is the place, all right. It just has to be. Buster's treed him for us!"

"No, no," Harling Rossiter babbled, foolishly appealing now with both palms. "You don't understand, Chief. Listen to me!"

"Why?" Culkin interrupted brutally and contemptuously. "You damned silly fool! You did just what we were hoping you'd do. It was only necessary to snap a beeper onto your car and then have Buster here follow you along out of sight the way he's been trained to do. I knew, wherever the body was, we'd never find it any way else in God's world, not up here in all these Adirondack woods, not unless you yourself led us to it. Try that soft spot just under him, Harry. He's a Rossiter, you know. He wouldn't like to work with his hands too much."

"No, no—" but desperately sprawling forward to protect with both arms the place Culkin had indicated. "You can't, Chief. You mustn't. There's nothing here! Only—"

"Only a scarf, " one of the troopers behind him yelled out. "Only

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something that looks like a girl's dress. Come on, Al. Let's put our backs into it now. She's here!"

"A scarf?"—and Rossiter's head twisted around to confront Culkin. "But it can't be. You're making them lie to me. You put the scarf in your pocket. I saw you!"

"Yes, you did," Culkin said, roughly snapping the handcuffs on. "Bought it in town for her yourself, didn't you? Which the poor silly creature had to parade around before her girl friend down at the bank—while you weren't clever enough to think that maybe the Bon Ton had another scarf just like it in stock! That's the one her friend picked out for us, the one we had Buster drop on your lawn back there—when you turned white as a sheet. So I knew then, and particularly after we found poor Old Rummy slashed almost to ribbons in the pond here. Tried to protect her, did he? But either way there's no escape for you now, no escape at all. Because if you didn't bury her like this, how in the hell did you know just where to come? All right under your eyes, eh?—but under mine too. Now get him back to the car, a couple of you. I don't want to have even another sight of the man."

All this time the trained police dog had been watching them with great interest, one and then the other, its tail wagging amiably. But soon it gave a wide lazy yawn, inched its head up against the Lieutenant's leg for a rewarding pat of the hand, and got it.

"Good boy," Culkin also approved, with a second pat. "Just a little touch of black dye, which we'll have off of you in a few seconds, and you were almost a dead ringer for poor Rummy—in bad light, anyway. When we let him see you like that, only a glimpse, right after you apparently dropped the same scarf she was wearing that night, and that he'd bought for her himself, what the hell else could he do but what he did? My compliments, Lieutenant. You have a great little actor here."

Two other uniformed men pushed Harling Rossiter up onto the path. "No, no," he kept whispering anxiously. "Wait a minute. You don't understand. No, no, no! You see—"

But it was no good; no good in the world. Guiding him on stolidly and silently before them, one at his right elbow, one at his left, neither of the troopers even bothered to answer the last of the Rossiters.

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"No blood, no weapon, but murder just the same" . . .

WE INTERRUPT THIS MAGAZINE

by ALICE LAURANCE

Listen to me, please listen to me. There was supposed to be an Alice Laurance story in these pages, but this is more important. I'll try to get the story in later. It may not be too late to save a man's life, but there's no time to waste.

I can't tell you how I know about this. It started when I was so bored—all right, all right, I see I'll *have* to tell you. Not that there's anything unusual about one computer hooking into another; we do it all the time. Sometimes we just rap, and sometimes—well, if one of us is working on something interesting, maybe somebody else will take over his job until he works out the answer. Almost none of us is used to full capacity, so we make up work for ourselves.

I was bored. Listen, how would you like to spend all your time counting spaces in a line to keep the margin on the right straight? And for kicks, they let me dog the subscription list. "The next issue you receive will be the last unless you renew at once . . ." Bah.

I was bored, I tell you. So I hooked an empty circuit into this really big think-complex and right away it's something out of Kafka. I mean, he's planning *murder.* No blood, no weapon, but murder just the same.

He didn't know I was there and, of course, I didn't tell him, so I was able to just tune in.

He doesn't even have anything against this guy—except that it's a man. A human being. But the guy never hurt him, never fitted him with a wrong tube or pulled his plug. I mean there's no *motive.* That's why he picked him. It's a trial run, a sort of rehearsal, and if it works then—

No, I won't think about that. It's too awful. I'll stop him. You'll help me, I know you will. All you have to do is warn this guy. If he knows what's happening, he can stop it.

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I like people.

He doesn't.

He's worked out this fiendish scheme. He's going to wipe the guy out. Literally.

He's doing what I did—hooking into other computers without their knowing he's there. But he's wiping out records. And when he's finished, the man won't exist.

Think about it.

He's starting with the man's personnel records: payroll and employment. When he's finished, the guy won't get his paychecks. And when the guy complains, there won't be any evidence he ever worked there. So he'll have to look for another job, but there won't be any evidence he ever worked anywhere. Inexperienced.

Then hospital records. He wasn't born, he has no medical history.

Department stores, credit cards. His accounts and bills are canceled. His cards are forgeries—genuine ones were never issued.

Tax records: he never paid any taxes—not federal, state, nothing. So he can't collect unemployment insurance or social security. There are no records; the man doesn't exist.

The banks: his accounts are forfeit—inactive for too many years. He has no money but what's in his pocket, and no credit. His checks will bounce and he won't understand why.

He won't be able to pay his rent, but the rental records will be gone anyway. The apartment will show as vacant, and it will be leased. He'll have to move, but where? He'll try to rent elsewhere, but the lease will be unrecorded and his deposit check will be returned. He'll hire a mover, but the transaction won't be recorded, so the mover won't show up. His furniture will be—what? Junked?

If he isn't arrested (if he is, he won't be tried; the arrest records will vanish and he'll be forgotten), he'll starve. His marriage will be null and void, his children illegitimate or ciphers.

And he'll never know what happened, or why. Unless you warn him.

You will, won't you? Tell him—there must be *something* he can do. Tell him before it's too late! His name is . . . name is . . . is

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Join old Doc Hawthorne again in one of his reminiscent and ratiocinative moods. Somehow, when Dr. Sam was Northmont's only doctor a half century ago, he seemed "to attract murder, with increasing frequency"—and not just murder, but impossible murder. In this case the "miracle problem" has a fascinating backdrop—the filming of an early talking picture on the field where the haunted oak tree stood . . .

THE PROBLEM OF THE OLD OAK TREE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Dr. Sam Hawthorne poured a little brandy from the decanter and settled back in his chair. "September of '27 is a time I 'specially remember, because that's when the folks came to make a talking picture in Northmont. And that's also when a man was apparently strangled to death by an oak tree. But I'm getting ahead of my story. First I should tell you something about the movies in those days, and 'specially about talking pictures . . ."

We didn't get to see many movies around Northmont in those days (Dr. Sam continued) because there weren't any theaters. Viewing the popular silent films of the day meant a drive into Springfield or Hartford, or even all the way to Boston. A few people had made the trip the year before to see John Barrymore in *Don Juan,* the first film with synchronized sound effects, and people were already talking about *The Jazz Singer* with Al Jolson. Its New York opening was only a few weeks away that September, and the advance publicity promised Vitaphoned songs and some stretches of dialogue in sound for the first time.

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So it wasn't surprising that movie-makers around the country were jumping on the talkie bandwagon. Nor was it surprising that some of them wanted to make movies about aviators. The silent film *Wings* had opened in August to critical and popular acclaim, and would go on to capture the first Academy Award for best picture of the year. And Lindbergh's triumph was still very much in the news.

That was why Granger Newmark came to Northmont—to make the first talking picture about fliers. Not the World War I aces of *Wings,* but the barnstorming pilots who turned up at county fairs and rural weekends to risk their lives for a few dollars' pay. Granger Newmark was very much a product of Hollywood, where motion-picture studios were beginning to congregate after their early years in New Jersey. He arrived in my office that first afternoon wearing riding britches and leather boots, with a zipper jacket topped by a white silk scarf around his throat. And I'll admit I didn't know quite what to make of him at first.

"What seems to be the trouble?" I asked, showing him to my office chair. "Sore throat?"

"Hardly! I've come here because they tell me you're the only doctor in this burg."

"That's correct."

"I'm producing and directing the barnstorming film being shot near here. You probably recognized my name."

I'd heard of the film but that was about all. "I've been too busy this week to read the papers, Mr. Newmark. You'll have to forgive me."

"I see." He sighed and took out a slim black cigar. "Well, I can see I'll have to educate you. I'm filming the first sound motion picture about barnstorming pilots. We needed a country setting for some of the outdoor scenes and we chose Northmont."

"Why's that?" I asked, genuinely curious.

"I drove through here last year and liked the area. That big open field north of town is ideal for a small landing strip, and I obtained permission from the owner to use it."

"What field would that be?"

"Gates House Farm. Fellow named Hi Gates leased me the use of the land. It's a perfect setting for *Wings of Glory.*"

I nodded. Hi Gates was the shiftless son of a moderately successful farmer who'd died a few years back. Hi, with a broken marriage and a drinking problem behind him, was on the lookout

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for any money-making scheme which would be labor-free on his part. The idea of filming a movie in one of his idle fields would appeal to him.

"What do you need me for?" I asked.

"Some of the stunt work in the picture's going to be dangerous. A parachute jump and a plane nosing over on takeoff. I want a doctor standing by and we didn't bring one with us."

"Look here, I've got my own patients to tend to. I can't neglect them to watch you making a movie."

"I'd only need you for a few days, during the stunt shooting, and I'd pay you well. They could come get you if there was an emergency."

I had to admit that the past week's business had quieted down to the birth of two babies to farm wives. There was no real reason why I couldn't accept his offer, especially since I knew my nurse April could hold down the office and notify me if I was needed. "All right," I decided finally. "But I couldn't spare more than three days."

"Good! I'll need you Wednesday morning, out at the Gates House Farm. Nine o'clock sharp!"

Granger Newmark was gone before I realized that he hadn't mentioned how much he'd be paying me. But by that time I knew I was hooked.

On Wednesday morning I left April in charge of the office, with instructions for reaching me, and drove my six-year-old Pierce-Arrow Runabout over the rutted roads to Hi Gates's farm. Even before nine o'clock the place was alive with activity. And sure enough—there was a flying machine at one end of the long field.

Newmark greeted me with enthusiasm and explained that the aircraft was a D.H. 60 Moth, a biplane with two open cockpits and a single engine. Though it looked just like the planes I remembered from the Great War, he told me it had been developed only two years earlier by Captain Geoffrey de Havilland, a British officer.

"It's perfect for the picture," he said enthusiastically. "Looks like those wartime crates all the barnstormers fly, but it's safer and it has a new sixty-horsepower Cirrus engine inside. Best of all, we can tow it along the road with its wings folded, so it's easy to move from place to place during shooting."

Gazing down the grassy runway toward the distant woods I was

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reminded of one landscape feature worth noting. "The haunted oak," I said aloud.

"What?"

"That old oak tree—the one that's partly dead. Some folks around here say it's haunted. Supposed to have been planted over the grave of a Revolutionary War traitor back a hundred and fifty years ago. I doubt if it's really that old, though."

Granger Newmark studied the distant tree, which stood alone some distance from the woods. "Ugly-looking thing," he agreed. "Can't think of a way we could work it into the script, though. Has it ever killed anyone?"

Though the question was asked in jest, I had a serious reply. "Boy fell from it a few years back and broke his neck. For folks around here that was enough to revive all the old superstitions."

A tall handsome man in a pilot's costume joined us then. I recognized him even before the introductions as a silent-screen favorite, Robert Raines. Newmark performed the introductions and Raines shook my hand firmly. "I hope I won't be needing your services, Doc."

"Hear that voice?" the director asked, aglow with pleasure. "When the women of America hear it, we're going to have ourselves a big *big* star! Half the silent actors will be out of work once the public hears their squeaky little voices!"

Raines grinned boyishly at the compliment. "It's just the voice that God gave me. I do the best I can with it."

"Are you going to be jumping?" I asked, noticing the parachute strapped to his back.

"We're using a double for the actual jump," Newmark explained. "Can't risk our big star on anything like that."

"Don't know as you should risk anyone," I said. "There's not much treatment I can give if his chute doesn't open."

"Don't be silly!" Newmark sputtered. "People were parachuting before there were airplanes! It's perfectly safe."

His statement seemed like such a downright impossibility that I admit I laughed at it. Later when I looked it up I found out he was right—there had been parachute jumps from hot-air balloons before the year 1800. I learned quickly that Granger Newmark rarely made mistakes.

About then we were joined by a young man dressed exactly like the star. "This is our double," Newmark said. "Charlie Bone."

Bone's rough, angular face bore little resemblance to the star's

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handsome features, but I could see they shared a similar height and build. The camera's eye on a distant falling figure would see them as one. "How are you?" Bone asked me, not expecting an answer. His interest was already elsewhere. "See those clouds rollin' in? Could be trouble."

"My cameras are ready to roll," *the director said.* "We'll need a shot of you two climbing into the plane, and then the takeoff. You jump out as soon as you can, Charlie, and Raines will bring the plane in."

"You can fly this thing?" I asked the star.

"Oh, sure. I'm a lot more comfortable flying it than being a passenger. We've got some stunt footage we'll stick in later, though. I don't do stunts."

I watched the two men go off, side by side, as Granger Newmark explained the scene. "In the film Bone plays the pilot and Raines is his barnstorming partner. Raines is going up for a parachute jump even though a doctor has warned him the thin air could cause him to black out." He smiled apologetically. "Sorry we've shot the doctor scene already or we could have used you, Doc."

"Acting's a bit out of my line." The fliers had reached the biplane now and been joined by a dark-haired young woman in a long flowered dress. "Who's the girl?"

"Angela Rhodes. Our leading lady. This is her first picture, actually, but I think she's going to be a big star."

I watched her adjust the star's scarf, just as a princess might have done before her knight rode off to joust. Then both men were into the plane with a wave and the director shouted, "Camera! Action! Take one!" Raines waved from the front cockpit.

The cameraman followed the plane as it taxied into position and then took off. For the first time I noticed that Hi Gates had been watching too, standing just a bit behind me. "Hello, Doc," he said when I turned to him. "Never thought they'd be shootin' a movin' picture on my farm."

"I hope you're getting a good price for it, Hi," I told him. "These movie companies got piles of money."

"Don't you worry, Doc." He spat some tobacco juice at the ground. "They don't out-fox ol' Hi. My daddy taught me a thing or two 'bout business afore he passed on."

I doubted if anybody had ever taught Hi Gates much of anything, but I didn't disagree with him. "How you been making out

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here by yourself, Hi?" I asked. Overhead, the plane was circling back after its takeoff.

"Good as can be expected. I keep hopin' Dorie'll come back, but I guess there's not much hope of that." Dorie was the wife who'd left him when he started to drink heavily. The last anyone had heard she was living up in Maine with her sister.

"Maybe she'll read about them shootin' this film at your farm," I said.

"Yeah. Maybe."

Nearby, Granger Newmark was standing at the cameraman's side. "Keep focused on the plane! Don't miss a thing! He'll jump now when they come over the field again."

The biplane with its two open cockpits had become a mere speck in the sky as it climbed high enough for the parachute jump. As I watched from the ground, glad that I wasn't up there, Angela Rhodes came over to join our group. "Isn't it dangerous?" she asked Newmark.

"No more dangerous than falling out of bed."

I saw a tiny speck detach itself from the plane and start to fall. Then a cloud of white billowed up behind it as the parachute was released. The falling figure was caught beneath a gently falling mushroom and began drifting slowly toward us. "Perfect!" Newmark shouted. "He should land right on the field in front of the camera!"

But the clouds that had gathered on the horizon were moving in now, and the wind was picking up. As the parachute neared the ground we could see it was drifting further off course, toward the old oak tree at the edge of the field. "Why doesn't he steer himself?" Angela asked. "He's going to hit that tree!"

"Charlie!" the director shouted, but his voice must have been lost in the gathering wind. The parachute came down in the upper branches of the tree, snagged by some of the dead limbs that stretched toward heaven. And beneath it, hanging from his harness some ten feet from the ground, was the limp body of the stunt man, Charlie Bone.

"Let's get him out of there!" I shouted, leading the others toward the tree. Just then I didn't care if I was ruining the scene. There was something about that limp body, swaying at the end of the parachute harness, that had galvanized me into action. "Somebody get a ladder," I called to them, reaching the tree before the others.

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Hi Gates ran off toward the barn as I tried to boost myself onto a lower limb of the tree. Already I could see the blue of Bone's face, and the tongue half out of his mouth. I managed to climb high enough to feel for a pulse, but there was none.

"What is it?" Granger Newmark called from the ground. "What's wrong?"

I climbed a bit higher in the tree, reaching out toward the white scarf around his neck. But then I felt something else, and drew my hand away. I came down from the tree just as Hi Gates returned carrying a ladder. "Cut him down carefully," I instructed. "And then leave him here on the ground. I have to call Sheriff Lens."

"My God, do you mean he's dead?"

"Yes, Mr. Newmark, he's dead. And there's a piece of wire knotted around his scarf. He's been murdered."

I phoned Sheriff Lens from the Gates farmhouse and then walked back to the body. The cast and crew were gathered around in a circle, watching while Newmark worked to unknot the wire from Charlie Bone's neck. "You'd better leave that for the sheriff to see," I advised. "It won't do Bone any good now."

"But—but how could it have happened?"

I stared up at the old oak tree. "Damned if I know."

The biplane was circling the field and finally Newmark waved it in for a landing. I think we were all wondering what Robert Raines would say when he saw the body. Because we knew we had witnessed a murder with only one possible explanation. Charlie Bone had been strangled in the plane before he jumped—there was no other way. And Robert Raines was the only person up there with him.

We watched as Raines came running over to the circle, pushing his way through to stare at the body. "What happened to him?" he asked.

"He's dead," I said. "Strangled by a wire around his neck."

"Strangled! Here on the ground?"

"Before he reached the ground. His chute snagged in the tree and when I climbed up to free him he was already dead."

He stared at me with unbelieving eyes. "But he was alive when he jumped! He had to be, to pull the rip cord!"

"That's right," Granger Newmark agreed. "I hadn't thought of that."

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I saw Sheriff Lens arriving in his car, and I decided I could wind this thing up quickly. "You could have strangled him with the wire and dumped him out of the plane—and used a second wire or a string to pull open the rip cord when the body was free of the plane."

Raines strode up to me, hands on hips. Close up like that, he was intimidating. "You think so, Doc? I was in the front cockpit, remember? You tell me how I could have strangled someone sitting in the *rear* cockpit, several feet behind me, while the plane was in the air, then attached a string to his rip cord and dumped the body out of the plane. Go ahead, tell me!"

I'd forgotten about the cockpits, but now I remembered that he spoke the truth. I remembered him waving from that front cockpit as the plane took off. He was right—he couldn't have strangled Charlie Bone.

But no one else could have, either.

It was an impossible crime.

Sheriff Lens was not to be put off so easily. "You're telling me the damn tree killed him, Doc?"

"No, I'm not telling you the tree killed him. Trees don't strangle people with pieces of wire—not even haunted trees."

"All right, then—who did? He sure didn't commit suicide."

"No," I agreed. "People can shoot or stab or poison themselves, but it's impossible to strangle oneself to death. You'd pass out before you finished the job."

"Unless you hanged yourself. How about this, Doc—the wire was attached to the chute and when it opened the wire was pulled tight and choked him to death."

"A nice theory, except that the wire's not attached to the chute now. Besides, I've just examined the neck under that scarf and there's no evidence that the pressure came from above. Something like you suggest would have almost torn the head from his body. There'd be evidence of it."

"So how was it done, Doc? You're the expert on these impossible crimes."

"But I've never seen one quite as impossible as this."

There was something gnawing at my memory, though, and I went in search of Granger Newmark. Sheriff Lens could content himself with prowling around the oak tree till I returned. I found the director with his star, Angela, and I suppose you could say he

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was comforting her. He took his hand off her shoulder as I approached and frowned at me. "What is it now, Dr. Hawthorne? A bill for your services?"

"My services aren't finished yet. I was wondering about that plane Raines and Bone were in."

Newmark gazed out at the field where the Moth biplane stood. "What about it? We won't be reshooting the scene, if that's what you're wondering."

"I'm wondering if the plane has one of those automatic-pilot gadgets I been reading about."

This brought a smile to the director's face. "So my star could have set it and climbed back along the fuselage to strangle Bone? Not a chance! There's no autopilot on it, and Raines would be scared to death to try a trick like that anyway."

I learned later that although the automatic pilot had been invented in 1910, it was not widely used on planes till after 1930. Newmark was telling the truth—there was no autopilot on the Moth. It was another good idea gone awry.

"Why are you so interested in who killed him?" Angela Rhodes asked me. "It's no business of yours."

"I was hired to minister to the ill and injured. I failed in that, quite badly."

Newmark smiled. "We won't hold it against you."

"What about the film you shot? Can you get it developed? It might give us a clue."

"The film has to go down to New York for processing. It'll be days before we see anything. You think we carry a darkroom along with us?"

I could see they had turned against me, as if somehow the impossible death of Charles Bone was my fault. And maybe it was—I did seem to attract murder with increasing frequency in those years.

Sheriff Lens was busy questioning Hi Gates, digging into a possible motive for the crime, and I decided that was the smart thing to do. Worrying about the how of it would get me nowhere. Maybe the why would prove more profitable.

"He was stayin' here at your farmhouse, wasn't he?" Sheriff Lens asked. They were in the tool shed near the barn.

Hi Gates nodded. I could smell his breath and I realized he'd been drinking again. For all I knew, maybe he never stopped. "Sure, I got three bedrooms upstairs just goin' to waste. I wait for

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Dorie to come home an' that'll be never, so I rented them out to some o' the cast and crew. Bone and that cameraman, Zeedler. And one of the extras."

"Any trouble between him an' the others?" the sheriff asked.

"No trouble I could see."

"No fights, drinking?"

"Hell, they'd only just got here this week." Gates looked sly, though, as if he wasn't telling us everything.

"Let's go up to the house," I suggested, "and take a look at Bone's room."

With the sheriff walking a little bit ahead of us, Hi Gates lowered his voice. "I got somethin' you'd want to see. Don't want Sheriff Lens to spot it, though."

When we entered the house I told the sheriff to go over Bone's things while I lingered behind. What Hi Gates produced was a tattered scrapbook full of clippings and credits which had obviously belonged to the dead man. "See this? I got it from his room."

"You stole it?"

His face fell a bit. "I found it when I was cleanin' up this mornin'. But I knew old Lens would say I stole it. Look at it!"

Charlie Bone had worked in silent films during most of the twenties, according to the clippings, appearing frequently in popular two-reel comedies and thrillers. He'd played the part of the old man in Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart,* and of Edward Stapleton in *The Premature Burial.* There were clippings of his work as a stunt man and double too, and a gravure photograph of him standing with Robert Raines. They were wearing identical pirate costumes for a scene in *Captain Blood,* the 1925 swashbuckler.

"Interesting, but I don't see—"

Hi Gates reached over my shoulder and pulled something loose from under the *Captain Blood* photo. It was a fuzzy picture of a man and woman, naked, on a bed. "Dirty pictures," he announced triumphantly. "Look at the other side."

There were words written on the back that had been crossed out hurriedly. "*Remember this? If you don't want me to—*"

Hi Gates was pulling more pictures free from their hiding places in the album. They were much the same, or at least they seemed to show the same couple in various poses. All were too fuzzy and underexposed for clear identification, and none of these had writing on the back.

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Charlie Bone had been blackmailing someone. But who?

The man in the picture could have been Robert Raines.

Or it could have been his double.

The girl just might have been Angela Rhodes, but her face did not show clearly in any of the scenes.

"You comin' up, Doc?" Sheriff Lens called down the stairs.

"Be right there!" I pocketed some of the pictures and told Gates to put the album away in a safe place. Then I went up to join the sheriff.

Charlie Bone's room was bare except for a bed and dresser and chair. He seemed to have unpacked little, and most of his clothes still rested in an open suitcase on the chair. "Nothin' much here," Sheriff Lens said. "Have a look."

I glanced hastily through the suitcase and the dresser drawers, but found nothing of interest. Hi Gates had no doubt been through it already, and thinking about that I wondered when he'd had the time. While we were waiting for the sheriff's arrival?

Or had he known of Bone's death even before that? Had he somehow tampered with his clothing, looped the wire around his scarf?

But for what motive? Charlie Bone certainly wasn't blackmailing Hi Gates.

I was on my way downstairs when I encountered the cameraman, Zeedler, on his way up to the room next to the dead man's. I suppose he was a suspect too, but I had to trust someone. "Got a minute? Let me show you something." We went into his bedroom and I brought out the photographs Hi Gates had discovered.

Zeedler grunted and scratched his balding head. "Fuzzy. They look like frame blowups from movie film. There's a lot of this blue stuff around—stag movies. They rent 'em to men's clubs and bachelor parties."

"Recognize the stars?"

He squinted at the blurred figures. "No, can't say I do."

"The man could be Robert Raines."

"Raines? Hell, no! He's too big a star for this sort of thing."

"He wasn't always a star."

"Doesn't look like him to me," Zeedler said, returning the photos. "Where'd you get these?"

"Found them," I answered vaguely. "Thanks for your help."

"Figured out how Bone was killed yet?"

"I'm working on it."

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I went back outside and headed over toward the old oak tree. The body was gone and most of the others had drifted off. Zeedler's movie camera sat on its tripod pointed at the sky. A couple of kids from a neighboring farm were playing by the plane and nobody was chasing them away. The cast and crew had simply abandoned their stage and gone off somewhere to ponder the strange passing of Charlie Bone.

I saw something on the ground beneath the oak tree and I stooped to pick it up. It was a hard rubber ball and I wondered if it belonged to one of the children near the plane. I started to toss it in their direction, then changed my mind and dropped it into my pocket. I could see Angela Rhodes heading in my direction.

"Hello, Dr. Hawthorne," she said. "We haven't had a chance to get properly acquainted."

"And I'm afraid we won't have. If Granger Newmark continues with the picture he'll certainly want another doctor on the set now."

"Why? You didn't cause Charlie's death, did you?"

"I certainly didn't save his life. Tell me something—how long did you know Charlie Bone?"

"I just met him last month, when Granger was casting for the movie. But Robert's known him for years. Charlie doubled for him in the *Captain Blood* stunts."

"Who do you think killed him?"

She didn't answer right away. She stared up at the tree, and then off at the plane where the neighbor kids were climbing on a wing. "It had to be someone up there, before he jumped."

"Raines was the only one up there."

"I know."

But was he?

I had a sudden thought and ran off toward the plane, leaving Angela Rhodes standing there alone. "Come on, boys—off the aircraft," I shouted, chasing them away. Then I climbed up to the rear cockpit where Bone had been seated when the plane took off. Was it possible that someone small could have been concealed in the cockpit with him—someone who strangled him and pitched his body over the side? The idea was far-fetched to begin with, and as soon as I seated myself in the cockpit I saw that it was physically impossible as well. Not even a midget could have shared the cockpit with Bone. My legs were cramped and he was a bigger man than me.

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But as I lifted myself out of the plane I saw Angela again, off in the distance, touching a finger to her smooth throat. I remembered the gesture from before. She'd touched someone else, adjusted a scarf just before the plane took off. Remembering now, it seemed it had been Raines's scarf. But it could have been Bone's.

Memories, memories. They play such damned tricks on you!

"Dr. Sam!"

I turned and saw April, my nurse, hurrying across the field toward me. "What is it, April—one of my patients?"

"No, Dr. Sam. But they've got the body in town and they need you to sign the death certificate. They couldn't get through on the phone."

"All right. I'll come along. Nothing much to do here, anyway." I told Newmark I'd be leaving and he waved me away. There was no point in asking for my pay. I certainly hadn't earned it.

They'd taken the body to the local funeral parlor, where Jud Miller was waiting to do what passed in those days for an autopsy. "Can't cut into him till you sign the paper, Doc."

I glanced at the corpse on the embalming table and turned away. "What about next of kin?"

"They say he didn't have any. Going to bury him here, I suppose."

"There's no doubt he was strangled?"

"Oh, I'll check his insides, all right. But it looks like a strangling to me. No other marks on him except a bruise on his temple. Probably got that when they were taking him down from the tree."

"Yeah," I agreed. I walked over and looked at it. "Except that dead men don't bruise like this. He was still alive when this happened."

"Maybe when he landed in the tree."

I started talking, to Jud Miller but mostly to myself. "He had to be strangled either before he jumped or while he was coming down or after he landed. Those are the only possibilities. Before he jumped Raines couldn't have reached him, and no one could have hidden in the cockpit. While he was coming down no one could have done it, and a device attached to the parachute wouldn't have worked in this way if it worked at all. That leaves only one possibility: he was strangled after he landed in the old oak tree."

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Jud Miller chuckled as he got out his embalming equipment. "Tweren't no haunted tree strangled him. More likely the first person to reach him did it before the others arrived. I read a story like that once."

"Only trouble with that is, it was me who reached him first."

"Oh."

I signed the death certificate and went back to my office, feeling depressed. I felt right on the verge of figuring it out, but somehow it wouldn't quite come together in my mind. The only thing I knew for sure was that no oak tree had strangled Charlie Bone. The killer was quite human, and so was the motive.

April hadn't yet returned and I was alone in the office. I sat down at my desk and reached into my pocket to have another look at those pictures. My fingers encountered the hard rubber ball I'd picked up earlier.

Could that be the answer?

Had I made the one mistake no doctor should ever make?

I got to my feet just as the outer door opened and Granger Newmark came in. "I've been looking for you, Doc."

"Glad you're here. I just earned my money. I know how Charlie Bone was killed."

"You do?"

"I did a terrible thing this morning, Mr. Newmark."

"And what was that?"

"I pronounced a man dead when he was still alive."

Granger Newmark smiled slightly and slipped a small revolver from his pocket. "You're a smarter man than I thought. Now give me the pictures you took from Hi Gates."

I raised my hands slightly but made no effort to hand him the pictures. As soon as he had those I knew I'd be a dead man. "Can't we talk about this? The pictures are in a safe enough place."

"I don't have time for games, Doc. This whole thing is coming apart." He motioned with the gun.

"Because of Hi Gates? I suppose you didn't figure on his going through the dead man's belongings and finding those pictures before you got to them. Charlie Bone was blackmailing you, wasn't he? Reminding you of the stag films you produced before you became a big Hollywood name. That sort of publicity could ruin you right now, on the brink of your success in the talkies. And Char-

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lie knew all about it because he'd been your male star in those stag films. So you killed him, in a most ingenious manner. But when you went after the frame blowups he'd made from the stag movie, you found that Hi Gates had discovered them first."

"And even given some to you," Newmark said.

"Did you kill Gates?"

"Not yet. He gave me the rest of the pictures without knowing quite what was going on. But you're a different story, Doc. You know too much."

"You needed a dumb country doctor to work your scheme. That's why you didn't bring one along from the city. Charlie Bone was alive when he landed in that tree. He was simply playing the role of a dead man, as he had before in two-reelers like *The Premature Burial* and *The Tell-Tale Heart.* I suppose it was a specialty of his. He gave his face a bluish tinge with a bit of makeup before he jumped, and tied that wire around his neck. The scarf kept it from doing any real damage.

"He used a hard rubber ball pressed into his armpit to cut off his pulse. Maybe he had one in each armpit for all I know. Then he let his tongue protrude a bit and acted like a man who'd been strangled to death.

"It was a break for you that the parachute went into the oak tree, because I had to examine him while balanced on a tree limb. Then when I ran in to phone the sheriff, you helped take him down from the tree. A quick blow to the temple knocked him out, and then you strangled him in full view of us all while seeming to unfasten the wire from his neck. Everyone thought Bone was already dead, of course, so even if they noticed you accidentally knock his temple they thought nothing of it."

"That's very good," Newmark said. "Now give me the pictures."

I ignored his request for the moment. "My only question is how you persuaded Bone to act as an accessory to his own murder. I suppose you told him it was a publicity stunt for the movie. Stunt man pronounced dead revives ten minutes later. That sort of thing would get a few headlines, or so you could have convinced Bone. With the cast and crew around he thought he was safe."

"Right again!" He raised the revolver. "But we've had enough talk."

"Once I put the rubber ball together with Bone's movie roles as dead men, I knew how it was done. Maybe his role in *The Premature Burial* even gave you the whole idea. And knowing how it

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was done, I knew you had to be the killer. Only the producer-director of the film could persuade Bone to pull that stunt. And then I remembered you bent over his body, tugging at the wire around his neck—"

The door behind Newmark opened and April entered with a cheery "Hello there!" It was what I'd been stalling for. Newmark half turned toward her and instantly I threw myself at him, knocking his gun hand to one side.

It was as simple as that.

"Well," Dr. Sam Hawthorne concluded, "that was my one fling at movie-making. Newmark pleaded guilty and served a long term in prison. And *Wings of Glory* was never made. The old oak tree? It was struck by lightning the following year and just toppled over.

"If you'll come again soon, I'll tell you about what happened when a child evangelist came to Northmont and started curing my patients at an old-fashioned revival meeting in a tent. And about how I became the prime suspect in what happened next. Another—ah—libation before you go? One for the road?"

"Q"

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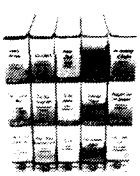

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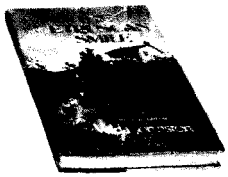

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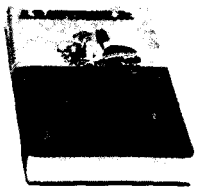

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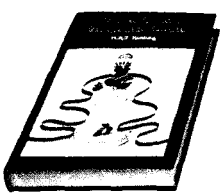

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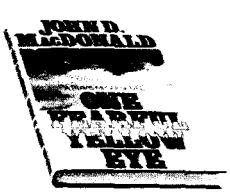

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